Introduction

This project was made possible by a National Teaching Fellowship Scheme award. It is intended to complement an earlier report – David Nicholls, 'What's the Use of History? The Career Destinations of History Graduates' – which was published in 2002 by the Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology and is available at http://www.hca.heacademy.ac.uk/history/h-journal.php. While that report concentrated on the *employment* of history graduates (the jobs that they enter), the present one is concerned with their *employability* (their preparedness and capacity for employment).

'What's the Use of History?' used the first destination statistics produced by the Higher Education Statistics Agency to examine the employment of history graduates six months after they have left university. It showed that they enter a very diverse range of jobs, around half of which do not require a degree qualification. However, there are limitations to the value of the first destination statistics. Above all, around 30% of history graduates go on to postgraduate study, a high proportion (higher than for most other cognate disciplines apart from English). Moreover, many take non-graduate jobs initially but subsequently enter careers that require a degree qualification. The first destination statistics, used by government as a performance indicator for higher education employability, therefore give a distorted picture of history graduate employment that does not do justice to the contribution of a history degree to long-term career prospects.[i] The report went on to consider the employment of history graduates three-and-a-half years after graduation, by which time the majority have found settled careers that more closely match their aspirations and their qualifications. It usually takes longer for graduates with non-vocational qualifications to find 'graduate' jobs and in the meantime they will experience lower remuneration and job satisfaction than those with vocational qualifications. However, because approximately 60% of job advertisements are non-specific as to degree qualification, history graduates are able to keep their options open and they enter many different careers as a result. It is important, therefore, if they are to be successful in their career ambitions in an extremely competitive labour marketplace, that they are able to demonstrate that they have the range of 'employability' skills that employers are looking for. 'What's the Use of History?' pointed to the careers of famous history graduates to show that a history degree could, indeed, equip students with the necessary employability skills to be successful in their working lives. However, these were atypical cases and the report said nothing about how studying history per se contributed to the development of employability skills. Accordingly, the present project uses empirical evidence assembled from questionnaires to provide a more forensic examination of the skills cultivated by a history education.

Readers of this report will find helpful complementary information in the Student Employability Profiles recently produced by twelve of the Subject Centres – especially those for cognate disciplines like English and Philosophical and Religious Studies. The Subject Centres collaborated with consultants from the Council for Industry and Higher Education and the Enhancing Student Employability Coordination Team (ESECT) to produce these.[ii] They have been created to indicate the skills that typically can be developed through the study of particular subjects. The Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology chose not to be involved in the project and is instead publishing this report as an alternative source of information and advice on the employability of history students for the community of history teachers, students and careers counsellors.

There are three main parts to the report:

- The first examines the rise of the employability skills agenda and its impact on higher education, together with a critique of the pedagogy that underpins it.
- The second provides an analysis of data on the skills development of history students using questionnaires completed by 'A' level students, third-year undergraduates, graduates of 2000 and famous graduates.
- In the third part, the relationship between personality-type and employability, based on self-reported characteristics, is tentatively explored.

The report concludes that history teaches many of the key employability skills and that graduates of the discipline are generally well-prepared for the jobs they enter, but that their employability could be enhanced by a few relatively simple changes to the curriculum.

Rise of the Skills Agenda

Higher education has been transformed in the past twenty years by the rise of the skills agenda. In his lecture 'Have the Humanities Ceased to be Relevant?' at Warwick University in October 1986, the distinguished historian Alan Bullock made no reference whatsoever to the part played by a university education in preparing students for the world of work. He acknowledged the rapid economic and technological change that was taking place but saw no need for a corresponding change in the content of humanities teaching. Rather, he sought to defend the importance of such an education in conventional terms – that is, as important in its own right.[iii] However, following the launch of the Enterprise in Higher Education initiative in 1988, the defence of a humanities education for its own sake without addressing wider questions about its relevance to student employability became more and more difficult to sustain.

It is not that the contribution of higher education to economic progress had never been considered before the EHE initiative. Far from it: the imparting of skills for employment had been an objective of higher education at least since the Robbins Report of 1963. However, the late 1980s saw the start of a major re-evaluation by the state of the importance of education to economic development, and skills education moved from being one among several objectives to become the central organising principle. Education for its own sake was no longer sufficient; now it must address and meet the needs of UK plc in an increasingly competitive global economy.

Policy was influenced by human capital theories which hold that growth in the stock of human capital is essential for economic growth. Employers demanded a more flexible and skilled workforce and pressured the government to reform the education system to make it deliver. The Royal Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, Manufactures and Commerce had instituted its manifesto for 'Capability' in 1980, and this, too, slowly began to influence educational practice. The skills agenda, however, was given a massive boost by the expansion of higher education in the early 1990s and by a raft of reports published by employers, government and higher education advisers trumpeting it and justifying it by reference to human capital theory. The wider social and economic responsibilities of higher education were encapsulated in the Dearing Report of 1997. Dearing charged universities with the task of imparting to their students four key skills: communication, numeracy, IT and learning how to learn. The Committee of Vice Chancellors commissioned Coopers and Lybrand to consider how Dearing's skills agenda might best be promoted. Their Report stressed the equal importance in developing student employability of traditional intellectual

skills, core or key skills, personal attributes and knowledge of how organisations work.[iv] That same year, the government set up a National Task Force to help develop a National Skills Agenda. Over the next two years, it published 29 research reports which reiterated the by-now familiar mantra of the link between economic competitiveness and education and the importance of teaching skills. Finally, the government decided to make employability a performance indicator for higher education.

None of this transpired without opposition and resistance within academia and criticism of the rationale that underpinned the drive for change, as we shall see. But, by the end of the millennium, the new paradigm had effectively infiltrated the whole of higher education. It became a requirement of external and internal quality assurance and validation that skills were taught and assessed, and QAA benchmark statements interpreted such skills in subject-specific contexts. Universities were charged with ensuring that their graduates were equipped for employment in the QAA's Code of Practice for *Career Education, Information and Guidance* introduced in 2001. The code has elevated the role of careers services in the mainstream academic business of universities.[v] Whatever their lingering doubts, academics proved themselves adept at incorporating skills into their programmes and at squaring the rationale for the skills agenda with their own pedagogic beliefs and practices: skills, they told themselves, had always been present and taught; now, admittedly, they were being made more explicit and embedded, mapped and taught progressively across degree-programmes. It was difficult to object to pedagogic arguments for many 'generic' skills that were clearly also of 'subject' importance and which could be inflected or emphasised according to the particular requirements of each discipline. There was also more than a *soupçon* of self-interest involved in emphasising generic skills and the employability dimension of non-vocational subjects like history, for showing potential students that history would lead to a job was a way of meeting recruitment targets and thereby safeguarding one's own job. Moreover, it was not unreasonable to apprise students of the career opportunities that their degree would open for them – indeed, students demanded as much – or get them to reflect upon their personal development[vi] - though they have proved less keen on this. In these ways, higher education gradually came to terms with the new pedagogy, adapted it to the old, and was more at ease with it than a decade earlier. By 2001, 70% of lecturers polled by the *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, agreed that undergraduates should take courses in core, employment-related skills, with only 26% dissenting,[vii] a finding that would have been quite unimaginable a decade earlier.

The change in educational practice in higher education was mirrored in government policy which shifted its attention to other sectors. For example, the QCA's *Key Skills for Developing Employability* (1999) was addressed to schoolteachers, and the final report of the National Task Force put emphasis on the need for schools to ensure a sound skills base and for generic skills to be developed within subjects, and recommended the creation of vocational GCSEs.[viii] The government's White Paper on *The Future of Higher Education* (January 2003) had very little to say about employability though what it did say indicated that it remained at the heart of its policy: '…we will continue to sponsor work already under way by HEFCE to integrate the skills and attributes which employers need, such as communication, enterprise and working with others, into higher education courses on a subject-by-subject basis' [para. 3.24]. The shift in focus away from higher education was confirmed six months later in a second White Paper, *21st Century Skills. Realising Our Potential* (July 2003), which was mainly targeted at school-level qualifications

and which expressed general satisfaction with what had been achieved in higher education, where the UK compared well internationally. Not so though in the percentage of the workforce qualified to intermediate skill level. The emphasis in the paper is on up-skilling the non-graduate labour force: ‘all pupils at KS4 should undertake work-related learning, including the development of enterprise capability’.[ix] Commenting on the White Paper, Barry Sheerman, chairman of the education and skills select committee, observed that there had ‘understandably’ been an obsession with the expansion of higher education, but that this had been to the neglect of skills at other levels.[x]

Critique of the Pedagogy of Skills

So, higher education has largely absorbed the skills agenda, but it has not done so uncritically or without effecting changes to it. As a result, the new pedagogy has not displaced the old but has been assimilated by it. Let us consider the main criticisms that have been voiced and the ways in which they have been addressed.

- A trawl of the burgeoning literature on skills education uncovers an extremely large number of skills – well into three figures – deemed worthy of cultivation. The language used to describe them is fuzzy, imprecise and has shifted over time. Skills have been variously classed as personal and transferable, core, key generic, enterprising, entrepreneurial, interactive and interpersonal and have been supplemented by other descriptors such as attributes, competences, graduateness and employability. Single skills, for example ‘communication’, are open to a variety of interpretations.[xi]

However, many of the skills descriptors overlap and are interchangeable and there has been a large measure of agreement among skills protagonists regarding the qualities that employers seek in graduates. According to Beryl Dixon, the top ten demanded are, in alphabetical not descending order: adaptability; commercial awareness; communication (oral and written); initiative; leadership; numeracy; persuasive powers; problem-solving ability; self-reliance; teamwork.[xii] Bennett et al suggest that there has been general agreement on the importance of five key skills: communication, numeracy, teamwork, IT and problem solving.[xiii] And other such lists are equally short and cover much the same ground.[xiv] They are usually grouped into succinct categories. Brenda Little identifies five: personal and social; communication; problem-solving; creativity; organisational.[xv] The Association of Graduate Recruiters emphasises just four: people skills; self-reliance skills; general skills; specialist skills. History, as we shall see, is very good at developing most of these skills,[xvi] though the profession perhaps needs to trumpet this success in order to combat common prejudices about its practical usefulness and to show that it is aware of, and willing to address, any outstanding shortcomings.

Some of the imprecision in terminology can be clarified at course or programme level. What matters most is that the teacher’s intentions are made explicit to students so that they know what is required of them and understand the language that is being used. The emphasis on learning outcomes in course documentation has encouraged both students and staff to think more carefully about these issues. That said, focussing on skills alone is not sufficient. The whole issue of preparing students for life after graduation has to be considered in terms of all aspects of a rounded education that fosters good learning.

- Even were it possible to identify a set of core skills to be developed, critics maintain, there is no evidence to suggest that they transfer readily from education to

the workplace. While some skills transfer, for example computer literacy, many others are context dependent. Workplace conditions and employer attitudes vary considerably to such an extent that it is virtually impossible to anticipate and prepare for them at university, and certainly not without a much greater investment of resources and commitment than has happened thus far. No generic skills programme that will meet the diverse needs of employers is possible across a multiplicity of subjects – a problem exacerbated by modularisation and combined programmes. Employer demands for 'oven-ready' graduates who can 'hit the ground running' are therefore unrealisable.[xvii]

It is highly unlikely that the culture shock of transition from education to work can be fully overcome, not least because employers frequently do little themselves to ease it. However, much can be done to anticipate and prepare for it. Evidence suggests that graduates usually take only a few months to settle into their jobs, so that facilitating the transfer is really the crucial objective. A pedagogy that emphasises creating autonomous, reflective and adaptive learners, fluent in the language of skills and capable of deploying it to their advantage, able to initiate and manage change in the workplace, and supported by an effective careers infrastructure will undoubtedly ease the transition.[xviii] Because skills development is context-dependent, it cannot but help if university programmes seek to give their students as much practice in developing skills in a variety of learning contexts. One in particular has been held by virtually all interested parties – employers, students and academic researchers – to be particularly effective in assisting the transfer process, namely properly-structured work experience.[xix] There is still a long way to go though before students universally gain the sort of work experience that is acknowledged to be effective. Humanities, including history, courses are particularly remiss in this regard and, while there are many practical obstacles to introducing effective placement schemes, there is nonetheless scope for recognising and making better use of the work experiences that students, not least mature students, have found for themselves. Moreover, much more remains to be done in the area of careers advice to help the transition. Academics are in general not well informed about (and often show little interest in) the likely employment destinations of their students.

- The fact that graduates settle relatively quickly into employment is indicative of a more overarching problem that has bedevilled higher education over the past twenty years, namely that policy has been too much driven by the misconceived demands of employers. Even as each of their shibboleths is systematically and conclusively demolished, the employers still refuse to lie down. Peter Hawkins calculated in 2002 that £100 million had been spent over the previous ten years on graduate employability but employers were still complaining about the quality of graduates.[xx] Yet, despite all their rhetoric about skills, they have consistently continued to place greater store in recruiting students upon pedigree of university, class of degree, and personality. Indeed, graduates of the universities that have been in the van in promoting the skills agenda, the former polytechnics, have been rather less favoured by employers.

Underlying this criticism is a broader sociological critique of employer recruitment practices which holds that they are geared to reproducing existing capitalist social relations rather than changing them. These relations are characterised by discrimination on the grounds of class, race, gender, disability and age. Employment policy is not primarily about up-skilling everyone and increasing opportunities for all. Rather, it is about preparing people for different categories of work. Many employers in fact want cheap and disposable, not costly and highly-

skilled, workers. A recent survey of the British workforce found that 57% of jobs required less than three months training. Over 20% of employees said that it took less than a month to learn the job well.[xxi] Race, gender and disability also affect employment opportunities – the same qualifications and skills have different exchange values for different social groups in the labour market. The focus on core skills is intended to reinforce existing cultural and political arrangements while leaving the employment practices of employers untouched.[xxii] Moreover, the skills agenda is essentially directed at the young graduate and not nearly enough attention is paid either by universities or employers to recognising or utilising the work experience of mature students and graduates. Indeed, age sits alongside race, gender and socio-economic background as factors that disadvantage graduates in the labour market and which, in combination, cumulatively disadvantage them.[xxiii]

Social and educational background is undoubtedly a major factor influencing employability; indeed, it is probably more central to recruitment practice than the degree-subject studied and knowledge acquired. Employers therefore could certainly do much more to promote equality of opportunity in employment. However, it must be recognised that from their perspective they are behaving rationally. Placing the cost of skills training on education and the taxpayer makes perfect sense from the employers' point of view, while recruiting from a select number of universities simply reflects the hard truth that there *are* differences in the abilities of graduates, unsurprising given the ability of these universities to select the most talented 'A' level students. Teachers would be abnegating their responsibility if, pending the revolution, they did not do their best to prepare students for their future careers because they were daunted by their inability to transform existing social relations. Widening participation makes it even more incumbent upon them to cultivate the diverse capabilities of a diverse student body who will be entering ever more diverse careers. The students themselves expect as much. They see their education as preparation for a job and wish to graduate with the skills that will help them secure the job they most desire. They (or their parents) will have made a serious economic investment themselves in the attempt by the time they graduate.

- Not only has the role of employers in promoting the skills agenda been questioned but so too has the economic rationale on which they (and the government) have based their case. The most trenchant and sustained critique of this sort is Alison Wolf's *Does Education Matter? Myths about education and economic growth* (Penguin, 2002) in which she argues that there is no simple equation between more education and economic growth. While there is evidence that literacy and numeracy are of immense importance in determining economic prospects, this is decidedly not the case with regard to vocational education and training. Indeed, government policy here has largely failed for vocational education is associated with lower valued, lower status jobs. Students have instead opted for higher education, which has accordingly expanded dramatically, and they have done so for sound reasons to avoid being placed at a disadvantage in a competitive labour market. However, economic growth is not the inevitable corollary of this widening participation; rather it has led to the increasing colonisation by graduates of hitherto 'non-graduate' jobs. The net result is that a sizeable part of the workforce is over-skilled and underemployed. Moreover, with the continuing decline in funding per student, the amount of time spent on teaching has decreased and so it is likely that 'those entering good jobs probably do so with *lower* skill levels than in previous years' (pp. 242-3). So misguided has been the government/employer-driven belief in the knowledge economy that in twenty years, Wolf predicts, key skills will have vanished from the education agenda.[xxiv]

Wolf's arguments appear to have fallen on deaf ears, at least as far as employers and the government are concerned. In response to a summary of them in the *Guardian* in January 2004, David Frost, Director-General of the British Chambers of Commerce, was unmoved: 'The focus', he wrote in a letter to the newspaper, 'must be on encouraging young people to take up vocational routes of learning and gaining skills business lack (sic)'.[xxv] Likewise, the Council for Industry and Higher Education in a report entitled *The Value of Higher Education*, authored by its chief executive Richard Brown and published in autumn 2003, dismissed fears of a graduate glut and emphasised both the economic and social benefits of an educated and skilled workforce. The report reaffirmed the faith of the government and the CBI in the need for more graduates and their value to the knowledge economy, and summed up its case with the catchy slogan 'the more you learn, the more you earn'.

There is some recognition in the CIHE's report of what is probably Wolf's most important conclusion – that education is about much more than economic growth and prosperity; it is also about teaching humane values.[xxvi] But, to all intents and purposes, neither government nor employers have relinquished their faith in the knowledge economy and policy remains very much driven by an instrumentalist approach.

- The instrumentalist thrust of the skills agenda was attacked by Ronald Barnett in 1994 in what has been perhaps the most powerful and acerbic critique of recent higher education policy.[xxvii] Barnett was withering in his criticism of the ways in which higher education was being transformed by the narrow, utilitarian focus on economic imperatives. The state's interference was undermining academic freedom and disenfranchising academics of their subject expertise. His arguments struck a chord among many academics who did not believe that it was their job to gear their teaching to the requirements of the national economy. They felt that the shifts in pedagogy were threatening disciplinary autonomy over curriculum content. The emphasis on learning over teaching, the need for different sorts of assessment, the increasing use of work placements were taking control away from them. Moreover, the skills agenda and the bureaucratic systems introduced to support it were regarded as a distraction from research which, despite the new emphasis on teaching, was still prioritised by themselves and, for the most part, by the institutions that employed them, not least because it seemed the key to funding, reputation and career progression.

In response to Barnett, it has been pointed out by Alison Assiter and others that educational policy has never been 'disinterested'. Even in the middle ages, it served the administrative purposes of church and state.[xxviii] Setting a 'liberal' education in opposition to a 'skills' or 'vocational' one is in fact an artificial formulation. Indeed, focussing on the short-term needs of the economy (for example, a perceived shortage of engineers) would more than likely be damaging to it in the longer term. Far better to have a system of higher education that produces flexible and creative graduates from all subject backgrounds (which through their job advertisements and interview techniques employers themselves evidently prefer) both for the economy generally and for the good health of education. A pedagogy that addresses the skills agenda does not have to be utilitarian – indeed, properly developed it is challenging, creating capable, reflective, critical learners.[xxix] The ambition of developing enterprising students may be a source of concern to traditional lecturers precisely because it encourages questioning students rather than passive ones and active rather than received learning styles. Hence, while the government/employer agenda may be narrowly conceived, many academics have internalised that agenda and transformed it

into a liberating and progressive pedagogy, and it is in that spirit that the present project was conceived.

The Project

The terms 'skills agenda' and 'employability' are used throughout this report as shorthand forms for an approach to teaching that seeks to make students better prepared for the world of work through the inculcation of active approaches to learning. Their adoption does not signify the triumph of a state/employer-driven utilitarian manifesto for higher education in which the place of 'learning' has been usurped by 'training'. On the contrary, the project is posited in the belief that higher education has confronted and slain this demon and in doing so has improved the quality of teaching. So, even when the biggest project-survey of graduate employment concludes that there never really was any skills gap as such and that the skills agenda was probably never really necessary,[xxx] it does not mean that the changes in teaching methods and to the curricula have been a waste of time, resources and energy (though nor does it mean that employers have ceased bemoaning the capabilities of graduates). Rather, out of the clash between the traditional and enterprise-oriented pedagogies has come a much more considered and consistent approach to curricular planning and delivery than was the case twenty years ago.

This drive for consistency and for ensuring minimum standards across degree programmes was encouraged by the adoption of subject benchmarks. The History Benchmark Group produced a non-prescriptive list of 'generic' skills that a graduate might reasonably expect to acquire in addition to conventional subject knowledge and skills. These were: self-discipline, self-direction, independence of mind and initiative, ability to work with others, ability to assemble, manage and use evidence and information, analytical and problem solving capabilities, good oral and writing skills, intellectual integrity and maturity, empathy and imaginative insight. While QAA subject reviews as a matter of course have looked for the extent to which the benchmarks have been incorporated into degree programmes, there has been no systematic investigation of whether students are in fact acquiring some or all of the generic skills, or to what degree. This report will endeavour to throw some light on this issue.

There has also been significant progress in thinking about teaching and learning.[xxxi] Many university teachers do not now see skills and knowledge development as mutually exclusive. 'Bolt-on' schemes have been tried and rejected in favour of the embedding of skills within the subject in a seamless, integrated way. Compared with the old-style curriculum there has been a shift from individual to collaborative forms of learning, learning outcomes are made much more explicit, more attention is paid to oral communication, assessment has become much more varied and the pedagogic value of formative assessment better appreciated, and there are also many more teaching formats where students are enabled to apply skills in a variety of situations and, in best practice, in a progressive manner, and students are encouraged to reflect much more on their learning by way of such devices as learning contracts, progress files and personal development plans. The value of the new approach within the discipline of history has been summarised well by Alan Booth:

> A clear articulation of skills to be developed in degree programmes and modules, and the explicit addressing of these in course delivery and in assessment processes, is not only educationally valuable per se, but more likely to make history appear relevant

> and attractive to students, few of whom become professional historians. Such an explicit approach can help to demonstrate to students that they possess a wide range of useful skills and underline the utility of what is a non-vocational subject. It can help to motivate them both as historians and learners more generally.[xxxii]

An integrated approach, and the student motivation it entails, helps resolve the contradiction exhibited in two responses frequently given by students regarding their expectations of university: on the one hand, they say they have come to study the discipline not skills; on the other, they expect their course to help them get the job they desire. In any case, only a small percentage will ever use their discipline knowledge again once they have graduated whereas the ongoing ability to learn how to learn will serve them throughout their lives.

Enthusiasts for an employability curriculum are agreed, therefore, that teaching skills is not incompatible with good learning. 'Empowering learners is about giving students control over the educational process and their post-educational lives…'.[xxxiii] This is the standpoint of ESECT, the Enhancing Student Employability Coordination Team, and the present project chimes with their approach. The ESECT definition of 'employability' is 'a set of achievements, skills and personal attributes that make students most likely to gain employment in their chosen occupation, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy'.[xxxiv] The team acknowledges that this definition is 'probabilistic'[xxxv] because employability in itself does not automatically lead to employment, which is dependent on the state of the labour market and, above all, on the many and varied characteristics of individuals, including their personal psychology. Employability is therefore an immensely complex concept and goes way beyond the simple notion of having a job or of having a check-list of personal and transferable skills. It is more about the capacity for employment than about employment per se. As Lee Harvey puts it: 'Employability is not a 'product' but a process of learning…. At root, employability is about learning, not least learning how to learn…. [I]t is about empowering learners as critical reflective citizens.'[xxxvi] This definition is therefore very much in the tradition of the RSA's 'capability movement' which has emphasised a holistic approach to learning, integrating knowledge, skills, understanding and personal qualities to develop the potential of individuals.[xxxvii]

Moreover, ESECT has come nearer than most skills/employability protagonists to meeting the objection that they have done little to address conceptual and theoretical shortcomings. In their work on the Skills *Plus* project, which preceded the establishment of ESECT, Peter Knight and Mantz Yorke developed the USEM model which stressed the importance of 'Understanding', 'Skills', 'Efficacy beliefs' and 'Metacognition' to the development of student employability, but also, beyond this, as the basis for good learning.[xxxviii] The inclusion of 'efficacy beliefs' is the key to, and the novelty of, their conceptualisation of employability. Influenced by the work of the American psychologist, Carol Dweck, they worked into their model an emphasis on the importance of a malleable (as opposed to fixed) belief in intelligence. Students with a fixed belief are more likely to accept failure as a product of their inadequate intelligence, whereas those with a malleable belief will more likely attribute such failure to their lack of effort and feel able to do something about it:

> Malleable self-theories go with a disposition to see tasks as opportunities for learning rather than as performance-oriented

> opportunities to demonstrate competence (or avoid showing incompetence). There are correlations between deep learning and a personal commitment to the pursuit of learning goals, and between surface learning and an orientation towards performance. Hence the self-theories that students – and their teachers – hold are likely to influence learning, with those tending to malleable self-theories being likely to have more belief in their ability to be effective when faced with novel challenges.[xxxix]

The emphasis on discipline understanding and the cultivation of subject and generic skills are important but insufficient unless students have the self-belief and self-confidence in their ability to improve and to learn, even from their mistakes. The challenge for higher education, therefore, is to devise curricula in such a way as to encourage a malleable belief and a well-developed self-confidence. Knight and Yorke believe that this can be done by attention, for example, to setting achievable goals and to using instruments like formative assessment to encourage greater risk-taking and a diminution in the negative effects on motivation of failure or poor performance. An employability-oriented curriculum does not automatically entail wholesale change but can be achieved through a process of fine-tuning, that is by auditing present practice and making sensible, manageable adjustments where necessary. Finally, the place of metacognition in their model recognises the importance of space in the curriculum for reflection on learning, and the development of the ability to recognise one's skills and talents and the capacity to act on the basis of this self-awareness (and is thus linked to 'efficacy beliefs' because those with a malleable belief are more likely to make better use of their achievements).

What's New?

History has figured in several major projects on employability – notably those carried out by PITAR, CHERI and HEFCE.[xl] However, in each case the data have covered a range of subjects and the part of the sample dealing with UK history students has been relatively small: 111 were surveyed for the PITAR project; 114 by CHERI; while HEFCE used the First Destination statistics with more detailed information provided on just 20 history students. Moreover, there is scope for updating their findings. CHERI dealt with graduates of 1995 sampled in 1998; PITAR with graduates of 1998 and 2000 (with a follow-up at the end of 2002); HEFCE with graduates of 2000.

The present project therefore provides more recent information about the employability of history graduates. More than this though, it approaches the issue from several new angles:

- Previous projects have been concerned with what might be termed 'throughput' (the skills acquired by students in higher education) and 'output' (the utilisation of skills in employment), but there is very little in the literature on 'input' (the skills students bring with them into higher education). This project examines the skills history students possess, or claim to possess, before entering university and thereby raises questions about whether higher education is focussing skills teaching in the most appropriate areas.
- The project deals only with history students and is based on the largest sample as yet studied. It does not therefore offer comparisons by subject or, as in the case of CHERI, a comparative international dimension. The overall sample size, comprising

'A' level students, undergraduates and graduates, is 540. Moreover, an attempt has been made where possible to compare and combine the findings with those from the related projects to produce conclusions based on the largest number of history students and graduates ever analysed.

- The project has also endeavoured to examine the skills development of individuals as they progress from school to employment and, thereby, to explore points of skills strengths and weaknesses across time.
- Famous history graduates were included in the survey, partly to promote the discipline as a route to good careers, but also in order to see if any factors could be uncovered that might help to explain their success and to allow comparisons to be made with the responses of current undergraduates and recent graduates.
- Finally, the project has asked questions about the personality of history students to see if there is any correlation between aspects of their character and psychology and their employability.

Project Methodology

The principal aim of the project has been to track the development of employability skills in history students from 'A' level to employment. To that end, questionnaires were sent out to four different cohorts: students in their 'A' level (A2) year; undergraduates in their final year; graduates three-and-a-half years after leaving university; and famous history graduates. Because of differences in educational practice across the constituent parts of the United Kingdom and to facilitate comparison, only English institutions were surveyed (though some of the famous graduates attended institutions outside England). The questionnaires were sent to the famous graduates in October 2003; to the graduates in November 2003; and to the two remaining cohorts, via their institutions, in February 2004 for completion by no later than the end of March.

Schools Six schools participated: Thomas Rotheram College, Rotherham; King Edward VI Upper School, Bury St Edmunds; Manchester Grammar School; Truro College; Harrogate Grammar School; and Ridge Danyers College, Cheadle.[xli] They were chosen for differences of type (11-18 comprehensive, sixth-form college, independent grammar) and for geographical spread. 350 questionnaires were sent out and 199 (57%) were completed. They were distributed directly to the students in class which helps account for the good rate of return.

Undergraduates Five higher education institutions assisted with the distribution of questionnaires to their final-year history graduates. It was decided to focus on the same type of student – full-time, single honours – for ease of comparability across the project and with other projects. A cross-section of institutions was chosen – two old (Manchester and Nottingham), one 1960s (Lancaster), one new (Huddersfield), and one college of higher education (Chester). They were also selected because of personal contact with colleagues active in promoting learning initiatives. 527 questionnaires were sent out and 191 were completed, a rate of return of just over 36% - again largely due to distribution directly to students in class. However, in this case, unlike the schools, the lecturers were dependent on the goodwill of colleagues for assistance with distribution and this was not always forthcoming. Rates of return therefore varied quite considerably between institutions: Chester and Lancaster

achieved impressive returns of 65% and 54% respectively, and Nottingham a respectable 42%. Huddersfield at 17% and Manchester at 15% were disappointing.

Graduates of 2000 Five universities, drawn from the old and new sectors (Liverpool, Warwick, Sussex, Staffordshire, Manchester Metropolitan), and one university college (Northampton) participated. Different institutions were chosen from the undergraduate sample in order to augment the range and variety of the data – thereby providing us with information on skills development at eleven higher education institutions instead of just five. Questionnaires were sent out to the full-time, single honours history graduates of 2000 via university alumni offices or history departments. Of the 319 distributed, 66 (21%) were completed. This low rate of return is in line with that experienced by comparable projects – for example, PITAR managed 22% and CHERI 27%. Out-of-date address databases are partly to blame but the main problem is one of inertia – it is difficult to persuade graduates three-and-a-half years after leaving their universities to take the trouble to respond. However, the small return was not unduly troubling because graduates in employment have been the main focus of employability projects and therefore a sizeable amount of data is already available that can be compared with, and supplemented by, the findings of this survey. Moreover, additional information on graduate employability came from the cohort of famous graduates.

Famous Graduates Famous graduates were included in the survey for two main reasons. The information assembled was to be used in a separate project designed to promote the study of history in schools.[xlii] For present purposes, it was hoped that the data might allow for useful comparisons to be made between the employability skills of those who had been palpably successful in their chosen careers and the other cohorts of aspirant history students and graduates. As it stands, the data is inevitably of an exploratory nature but it provides some fascinating insights, raises useful questions for future research (for other disciplines as well as history), and hopefully can be used to add some colour to the careers advice provided for students by teachers and careers officers. Famous history graduates were identified from information provided by colleagues in university history departments, alumni offices and from reference sources such as web-sites, newspapers and biographical dictionaries. The definition of ‘fame’ was circumscribed by the ambition of the project: that is, it encompassed those who had risen to high positions, or had achieved a national reputation, in their jobs. At the same time, well-know academic historians were excluded as the project was concerned to explore the transferability of skills and the diversity of employment to which a history degree might lead. 198 ‘famous graduates’ were thus identified and sent questionnaires, though it was not always possible to trace their addresses and some were therefore sent ‘care of’ to agents or organisations, such as the BBC. Despite this, and initial doubts as to whether most would bother to reply, 84 (over 42%) completed the questionnaire, while several others sent letters of encouragement. This evident sentiment for history, backed up by comments in the questionnaires, was enormously encouraging and a testament to the vitality of the discipline.

In all, then, 1394 questionnaires were sent out and 540 were returned, an overall response rate of 38.7%.

Questionnaires It is not proposed here to go into detail on the layout and content of the questionnaires – these can be adduced from the analysis of the returns in the next section and by reference to the 'Graduates of 2000' questionnaire in Appendix B. This was the fullest of the questionnaires because of the longer experience of that particular cohort but all four questionnaires covered the same ground, with sections on the background of the respondents, their skills development and work experience, and their personalities. Some 'open' questions were included in order to supplement and complement the statistical data with qualitative information.

The design of the section on skills was influenced by the CHERI and PITAR surveys (the latter was itself based on the former) to assist with comparisons and some merging of data. CHERI and PITAR asked respondents to rate 37 and 36 separate skills respectively but it was felt that large lists like these might deter many from completing the questionnaire. Indeed, the PITAR researchers had themselves recommended a reduction in future surveys.[xliii] Accordingly, the number of skills investigated was limited to twenty, although 'Computer Skills' were broken down into five sub-categories in order to provide a more precise analysis of IT competence. Some skills were excluded, such as foreign language proficiency, the weaknesses here having been well-documented. Similar ones were merged – for example, accuracy, attention to detail and power of concentration were assimilated under 'ability to collect and record data'; leadership and taking responsibility were likewise linked. Respondents were asked to rate their level of ability in the respective skills on a scale of 1 (poor or non-existent) to 5 (highly-developed), and at each stage of their experience: school, university and employment. Graduates therefore had more boxes to fill than undergraduates who in turn had more than 'A' level students, but structuring the questionnaires in this way encouraged respondents to reflect on, and provide an overview of, their skills development and allows issues of progression and comparison between the several stages to be examined. All were also asked to consider the specific contribution, on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely important), that studying history had made in helping them develop their skills, thereby permitting some distinction to be made between the contribution of their history education and other aspects of their educational and extra-curricular experiences.

Data Analysis SPSS was used as the statistical tool to record and analyse the data from the questionnaires. Entry was done manually during the summer months of 2004 with the assistance of a graduate student at Manchester Metropolitan University. Chi Square tests were used to check that the results fell within the parameters of reliability. Statistical rigour can never, of course, negate the limitations of analysing data from postal questionnaires – which are, principally, that the responses are subjective and the respondents self-selecting – but they can be mitigated by large sample size. The use of painstaking follow-up research, for example telephone interviews, to check the data assembled from questionnaires has lent weight to arguments that support its methodological utility. Moreover, the questionnaires have a further value beyond statistical veracity in that they encourage and capture the reflections of students on their education. The findings that follow are therefore presented with confidence in their usefulness and as signposts for action or for further research.

Project Findings

'A' Level Students

The sample of 'A' level history students comprised 115 (57.8%) male and 84 (42.2%) female. Asked why they had chosen to study history, the vast majority (over 82%) said it was because they enjoyed it, found it interesting, or it was their favourite subject. Some were especially effusive, using adjectives like 'fascinating', 'exciting', 'brilliant', and 'compelling'. In second place, a long way behind at 19.6%, was the claim that they were 'good at it'. The other reasons proffered were statistically marginal, but nevertheless interesting.[xliv] Eight felt that it would develop their skills; six believed understanding the past helped them understand the present; and five were inspired by good teaching. Judging from the high levels of enjoyment, it is evident that many more had experienced excellent teaching, even if this remained unsaid. Five recorded that they were doing history at 'A' level because they had done it at GCSE, while two were doing it because they had not done it at GCSE and wanted to study something new. Also, it 'complements other subjects/contrasts with science focus' (4), 'will help with a career in law' (2), 'will be valuable in future (1), 'keeps my options open' (1), allows me to pursue my interest in a particular topic (4: medicine, Russia, war and Nazis were specified), it is 'easy' (1) and, more negatively, because 'I'm not strong enough at geography' (1).

41 (20.6%) intended to study history at university and 37 of these had settled on the university they hoped to attend. In determining their choice, the course's history content was held to be important or extremely important by 74%, its skills content by 37% and the opportunity it offered for work experience by just 20% (with 60% deeming this not significant at all). Other reasons specified were: location (16%), reputation of university/department/teaching (10.8%), while sport, social life, availability of another subject, and opportunity to study abroad each received a single endorsement.

The skills students believed they had become most proficient in at school [see Appendix C, Tables 1 and 2] were, in rank order: writing, reading, working independently, the ability to reflect, assess a situation and adapt, evaluation and creative thinking (equal fifth). The least developed were three IT skills – creating databases, creating spreadsheets and using databases – followed by numeracy and leadership. History had contributed in some part to the development of all the skills but general school education had been more significant in the teaching of numeracy and IT skills, despite the students' general overall weakness here, and in encouraging creative thinking, teamwork and leadership. History's contribution was held by students to have been especially helpful in developing their powers of evaluation. It should be noted that they rated their abilities significantly higher (mean score for all skills: 3.56) when compared with the retrospective assessments of school education made by the undergraduates (2.93), graduates (2.69), and famous graduates (2.54).[xlv] This could suggest improvements in school teaching but is more likely to reflect judgements based on experience and the ability to apply a comparative perspective.

Asked if they had developed any skills outside school or college, 69 (35%) replied that they had. One hundred skills were mentioned, the most by any one individual was three. Leadership/responsibility was identified most frequently, 29 times, followed by cooperation/teamwork (21), IT (19), oral communication (9), time management (5), decision-making (4), reflect/assess/act (3), creativity (2), problem-solving (2), reading (2), and multitasking, numeracy, working independently and

writing each just once. It is noteworthy that, for some students, extra-curricular activities were helping them to develop skills that were not so well cultivated in school – notably leadership and IT. The main place where these skills were developed was in the home, often from hobbies, or through participation in sport – both at 25%. Also important was involvement in other leisure activities such as music, drama, and a variety of social clubs (21%). Some more formal activities contributed as well, such as taking part in the army training corps, scouts, crusader camp and Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme (12%). Participation in voluntary or charitable work accounted for 11%, while the remaining 6% were variously described as 'personal business ventures', 'research' and 'independent study'. The students attached great importance to the contribution these activities had made to the development of their skills. Asked to assess their competence on a scale of 1 (basic) to 5 (highly developed), all of them believed they had progressed beyond the basic level: 2% to the second level, 10% to the third, 35% to the fourth and 53% to the fifth.

The questionnaire offered students the opportunity to comment further on their skills development. Only eight did so. Two observed that the large amount of coursework in history had helped them to learn to write concisely. Another, however, felt that some of the coursework might usefully be replaced with presentations and oral work to improve confidence and presentational skills. Extra-curricular activities, usually within school, had helped one student with their organisational skills; another remarked on the value of sport; and a third on the importance played by 'interaction with peers'. However, while school had undoubtedly assisted the skills development of one student, 'outside factors have probably helped more'. Finally, one student sagely recognised that innate ability, education and application were all important: 'College and history can enhance what you already have if you put the work in.'

Part-time work experience was also playing an important role in developing the students' employability skills. 84% of the cohort had had some work experience, often in more than one job – some 334 different part-time jobs were identified. As might be expected, the vast majority were unskilled, primarily labouring, waiting/bar-work and newspaper rounds. Using the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC), 50% were 'elementary occupations' and a further 40% fell in the category 'sales and customer service occupations', many students being employed as shop assistants. Only a very few had work experience requiring higher-level skills. Most employment was short-term – 30% for less than one month, 21% for 1-6 months, and 17% for 6-12 months. However, 20% had been in part-time work between one and two years and 12% for over two years.

Despite the basic nature of most of this work, nearly 80% of those who had had part-time jobs said they had acquired new skills as a result. The most frequently mentioned were customer service/interpersonal/people skills (40), oral communication (34), teamwork (30), leadership/responsibility (14) and time management (12). However, the experience was not always entirely positive: one student referred to learning 'how to loathe the general public' and another to 'handling bosses that are idiots'. Other skills or qualities mentioned were working independently (6), IT (6), organisational (6), cooperation (5), patience/coping with repetition (4), multitasking (3), ability to reflect, assess and act (3), commitment/hard work (2), confidence (2), initiative (2), numeracy (2), problem-solving (2), research (2). Eleven received just one mention: listening, creativity, reading, efficiency, delegation, knowledge, politeness, accuracy, presentational, adaptability, confidentiality. A large number of students listed job-specific skills – for example to do with aspects of retailing – and some were quite specific (cutting meat, ear-

piercing) and were often described cynically or with tongue-in-cheek, such as 'how to pull the perfect pint', 'how to hang clothes on a coat hanger', 'how to replace a hip', or 'how to mop properly'!

A majority of the students (56%) already had a career in mind. Of the 106 who specified this, 21 said law, 17 some aspect of the media including journalism, 14 teaching, 8 the police force, 7 business/finance, 6 medicine, 5 psychology, and 3 politics. Of course, many of these students were not intending to continue with history at university and their career ambitions would be built on the back of another degree subject. Nevertheless, studying history to 'A' level was not seen as a bar to a multiplicity of careers. Others mentioned were arts-related (3), archaeology (2), armed forces (2), marine biologist (2), author/poet (2), quantity surveyor (2), and one each for accountant, fireman, forensic scientist, interior designer, IT specialist, pharmacist, physicist, town planner and, last but not least, athlete.

62% had availed themselves of careers advice offered by their school or college, 29% said it was available but they had not yet sought it, while the remaining 9% said they had been given no advice. On a scale of 1 (not useful) to 5 (extremely useful), the balance tilted towards the former with students rating the advice given as follows: 1 (17%), 2 (21%), 3 (32%), 4 (18%), 5 (12%). If the findings here are in any way typical, there is some need for schools to review their provision of careers guidance.

The students were asked in what ways studying history had helped prepare them for (a) the world of work, (b) achieving their career ambitions, and (c) tasks in other spheres of life. 47 (23.6%) did not answer this question in whole or in part. There were also several 'Not at all' or 'Don't know' responses to each of the three sections. Nearly all the respondents approached the question by repeating one or more of the various skills that they had already rated earlier in the questionnaire, and this was done in all three sections. Some version of 'understanding of the modern world and of other cultures' also figured throughout, though most often in response to (c). An idiosyncratic variation on this theme was the answer 'prepared me for horrible people in the world'. Perhaps the student in question had overdosed on Hitler and Stalin! In terms specifically of their careers, several students saw history as a good qualification, a solid basis for entry into university, and pertinent to their ambitions (for example, to be a teacher or to study law). More than one referred to history requiring hard work and discipline, qualities that would be needed when they were employed. One said that 'it helps me think on my feet'. However, a budding psychology student observed quite frankly that it 'helped me decide what I want to do (not history)'. As for the wider sphere, the pleasures of travel were augmented by historical knowledge of the countries visited; history also helped towards objectivity, taking a balanced view of things and respecting the views of other people. It was seen as useful in social intercourse – a topic of conversation, especially when meeting people for the first time, and in promoting confidence in discussing issues with older people. It helped one student gauge whether 'people are trying to deceive you', and another 'with my business ventures'. For one student its overall value, reiterated in each of the three sections, was simple: 'Those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it.'

Undergraduates

Of the 191 undergraduates who completed the questionnaires, the distribution by university was as follows: Lancaster 88 (46.1% of the sample), Nottingham 63 (33%),

Manchester 18 (9.4%), Huddersfield 12 (6.3%), and Chester 10 (5.2%). There was a slight preponderance of men at 52%. The vast majority had entered university directly from school or college – 72% at 18 and 17.8% at 19 years of age. Nine (4.7%) were aged 20-22, five (2.6%) were in their 30s, and two (1%), the oldest, were both aged 40. Four (2%) declined to give their ages.

By far the most popular reason for choosing to study history at university was enjoyment and interest. Of 226 separate reasons proffered, this appeared 119 times. In a few cases, the interest was prompted by a negative impulse: 'It was the only subject I didn't hate'; 'It seemed interesting and I had nothing better to do'; 'Because geography is boring'. 34 stated that they were influenced by the reputation of their chosen university, an unanticipated response as reasons for choice of university was the subject of the next question. 23 said that they were good at history and had done well in the subject at school, including at 'A' level. One of them admitted that they 'couldn't do anything else'. 18 had chosen it because they saw it as a respected qualification that would lead to a specific career (law and history teaching were mentioned) or, alternatively, to a wide range of jobs, allowing them in the meantime to keep their options open. 13 thought it would develop their skills, while 9 valued subject-content, including the way it helped them understand present-day events. For 7 of them, history had not been their first choice – they had transferred from another subject because they were not happy with their original choice and had decided that they liked history more and would be better at it. Finally, 3 said they had been encouraged by their schoolteachers to continue with history at university.

Their reasons for choosing their university mirrored those given by their 'A' level counterparts with exactly the same proportion (74%) rating the course's content important or extremely important in determining their decision. Skills content was rated important or extremely important by 33% and the opportunity for work experience by just 12% with over two-thirds of them considering this to be of little or no importance. Asked to suggest other reasons, 8% mentioned reputation (less than half the number who had adduced this in answer to the previous question), 3% location (including 'cheaper to live at home'), 2% an attractive campus, 2% the ethos of the department and the impression made by attendance at the Open Day, and 1.5% personal factors, such as family commitments. The availability of subsidiary modules and the advice of teachers were each mentioned just once.

Undergraduates were probably in a better position than either of the graduate cohorts to reflect on the respective contributions of school and university to their skills development, the former still being relatively fresh in their memories. They reported that the top five skills they had developed at university were, in rank order: working independently, reading, writing, preparing/researching before acting, and ability to evaluate the reliability of data and arguments [see Appendix C, Tables 1 and 3]. Reading and writing were also in the top five of the skills developed at school, alongside multitasking, time management and word processing. The place of the last, right at the top of this list, is evidence of the progress in teaching IT skills and the general rise in computer literacy in recent years but it also raises questions about the time devoted to it in the university skills curriculum, especially when considered in the light of the least developed skills. At school, these were, in rank order: creating spreadsheets, creating databases, using databases, numeracy, and preparing/researching. Significantly, four of these were also in the bottom five at university, leadership taking the place of preparing/researching which, as we have seen, had now shot up the list. The poor grasp of some IT skills, the exceptions being word processing and internet use, is certainly something which could be addressed in

the history curriculum. Using and creating databases and creating spreadsheets have practical applications for historical study and research but remain under-developed on the evidence of the students surveyed here. Incorporating IT work of this kind into the history curriculum would not only enrich computing skills but would also improve the numerical competence of students (which was receiving significantly less stimulus at university). It would thereby address one of the most important skills required in employment and other aspects of day-to-day life, and which has been shown by the research on employability skills to be the most often deficient. Moreover, that there is a demand for these skills in jobs taken by history graduates is evident in the assessment that the graduates of 2002 made regarding their current employment [see Appendix C, Table 5], and which, because history graduates are less likely to apply for jobs requiring such skills, may in fact underestimate their importance.

In many cases, the students' skills had improved at university by almost a full point on the five-point scale. The mean for all skills was 2.93 at school and 3.66 at university. Working independently, reading, presentational skills, reflection, preparation/research, learning how to learn, ability to collect and record data, structure and synthesise data, evaluate and implement solutions (this last showing the biggest improvement) had all risen by over one full point. History was held to have contributed well to the development of nearly all of these skills, the mean being 3.57. This is perhaps not surprising given that these are single-honours students who will have spent most of their time at university in history classes. However, history itself had contributed significantly less than the university as a whole to what limited ability the undergraduates had in numeracy and in database and spreadsheet skills.

Once again, extra-curricular activities had played a part in honing skills. 75 (39%) of the sample said they had developed skills through such activities, the main ones being sports, recreational and leisure pursuits, membership of societies and clubs, gap year experiences, voluntary work, guiding/scouting, work on a student paper, and committee work. Of the 126 skills identified by the 75 respondents, leadership/responsibility was mentioned most often, 36 times in all. As this was fifth from the bottom in the list of skills developed at university, it is evident that extra-curricular activities can play an important part in supplementing and complementing educational endeavours. The other skills were: IT (14), cooperation/teamwork (13), oral communication (12), multitasking (9), time management (8), problem solving (5), writing (5), collect/record data (4), presentational (3), creativity (3), numeracy (2), reading (2), independent work (2), organisational (2), and one each for adaptability, reflection, confidence, referencing, social skills and teaching. On a scale of 1 (basic) to 5 (highly developed), the students scored their abilities quite highly with 55 rated 4, 51 at 5 and none at the most basic level. The mean score was 3.2. As yet, universities have done little to capture or recognise the contribution made by these activities to their students' overall development, though progress files may go some way to addressing this.

Only a handful took the opportunity to comment further on their overall skills development but, apart from one student who had become 'less apprehensive and nervous' about speaking in public and another who felt that 'living away from home helped maturity', they virtually all made the point that they would have welcomed more attention paid to aspects of skills and employability. The following comments illustrate this:

> I think more time could have been spent teaching specific skills at university as I felt I have lost the ability to do some skills.

> Although I have taken some skills from university which will be useful in employment, I believe the vast majority of the skills I will need have come from my work experience rather than university experience.

And, perhaps most pertinently:

> I still don't know which skills will make me particularly employable or how to market them.

These misgivings among students about the general commitment of their tutors to skills development is further illustrated by the small number – 15 (8%) of the 191 – who reported that their course included a work placement or work experience element. They came from just two institutions – Huddersfield and Chester – which offer full-time work placements lasting approximately 6 weeks during the second year of their programmes. There was little variety in the placements reported – 12 of the 15 had helped in schools, 2 had worked in museums and archives, one was non-specific – but the experience itself was highly regarded.

Most work experience had been gained outside the formal requirements of the degree programme. 70% of the cohort had had jobs before coming to university, most were part-time, and many students had held more than one. 252 in total were specified. The majority fell into the 'elementary' (37.7%), 'sales and customer service' (27.4%), or 'administrative and technical' (17.5%) categories. The full SOC breakdown was: managers and senior officials (2), professional occupations (12), associate professional and technical (11), administrative and secretarial (44), skilled trades (6), personal service (12), sales and customer service (69), process, plant and machine operatives (1), elementary (95). Over half of the jobs were of less than 6 months duration, though one quarter were over two years.[xlvi]

The number continuing with part-time jobs during their time at university fell to 53.4%. The 102 students who had been so employed identified a total of 157 jobs, with a similar occupational distribution to those described prior to university: 47% elementary, 35% sales, 7% secretarial, 4.5% personal service, 3% professional, 2.5% associate professional, and 0.6% skilled. 42.6% were in the same job for under 6 months, 16.4% for 6-12 months, 17.2% for 1-2 years, and 23.8% for over 2 years.

Like the school students, many of the undergraduates believed their experience of work had benefited their skills development. 98 said they had acquired new skills. These were, in rank order: people/interpersonal/customer service (41), leadership/responsibility (23), oral communication (17), teamwork (16), time management (15), management/organisational (15), IT (8), numeracy (4), problem solving (3), research (3), working independently (3), patience/'dealing with boredom' (3), confidence (2), coping with pressure (2), decision-making (2), hard work (2). A further twelve received one mention: collect/record data, prioritise tasks, analytical, archival, multitasking, presentational, reading, listening, motivation, teaching, negotiation, reflect. As might be expected from a preponderance of elementary tasks, not all were high order skills though some practical, job-specific ones were acquired. Examples from the 15 miscellaneous ones mentioned were: ' rewire a house', 'drink lots', 'general butchery', hairdressing, 'pouring pints', 'shelf stacking', food hygiene, and, intriguingly, 'vote rigging'. Despite the undoubted value to many students of much extra-curricular experience, it was not channelled or recognised by their university.

With just a few months to graduation, only half of the students (50.3%) had as yet decided on a career. Of the 89 who had done so, teaching (chosen by 32) was by far the most popular, followed by law (10), archivist/museum/ heritage (8),

journalism/media (7), advertising/marketing/PR (5), armed forces (5), finance/business/management (5), civil service (3), police (3), publishing (2), research (2), charity (1), accountancy (1), music industry (1), politics (1), sports psychology (1), UN Development Agency (1) and international superstar (1). The variety here reaffirms the point that a history degree is a passport to many careers and does not close doors – even to superstardom!

50% of the students said they had been given careers advice at university, 40.6% said it was available but they had not availed themselves of it, while the remaining 9.4% said they had received no advice, though this was presumably because of (unwitting?) inertia as it was clearly available at all the institutions surveyed. The use and valuation of careers advice by the undergraduates is a cause for concern. While one-in-ten appeared oblivious of the careers service, of those who did use it a significant number thought it rather less than useful. On a scale of 1 (not useful) to 5 (extremely useful), 11% opted for 1, 24.2% for 2, 26.4% for 3, 33% for 4, and 5.4% for 5.

When asked how studying history had helped prepare them for (a) the world of work, (b) realising their career ambitions, and (c) tasks in other spheres of life, most students drew upon the list of skills identified earlier in the questionnaire, especially with regard to preparation for employment. However, the frequency with which they identified certain skills is a good indicator of the relative importance they attached to them. In this regard, nine key skills stand out: time management/meeting deadlines (mentioned 47 times in answer to (a)), presentational skills (33), research (31), analysing and drawing conclusions (31), writing (27), oral communication (22), teamwork (21), organisational (19), and working independently (17). In the light of the earlier skills ratings, this suggests that some students are developing teamwork and oral communication skills much better than others.[xlvii] Several students said that their degree had taught them to apply or transfer skills to new contexts, and those who had undertaken a work placement rated this as extremely valuable. A small minority said the degree had done little or nothing to prepare them for the world of work. This was also the case with regard to achieving their career ambitions and seven admitted that they had not identified a career or had any such ambitions, but the most frequent response was to refer to achieving a good qualification. For a few, it was the prerequisite for postgraduate study. Some were specific as to the career for which their degree had prepared them – teaching (from primary to university levels) was most frequently mentioned, but heritage, archives, marketing, law and journalism also figured. Finally, several felt that they would be able to keep their options open and could, as one put it, 'find a career I'm interested in and can feel passionate about'. As for help with tasks in other spheres, this was answered less frequently but, as well as referring again to skills like organisation, time management, writing, and analytical and critical abilities, studying history had helped boost the confidence of many students, and had given them a better understanding of the world, broadened their outlook, enhanced their ability to assess and engage with arguments, see different viewpoints, and interact with others.

Graduates

Of the 66 graduates of 2000 who returned questionnaires, 11 (16.7% of the sample) were alumni of Liverpool University, 13 (19.7%) of Manchester Metropolitan, 3 (4.5%) of Northampton, 7 (10.6%) of Staffordshire, 9 (13.6%) of Sussex and 23 (34.8%) of Warwick. A marked preponderance were female – 60%.

Three-quarters of the cohort had entered university straight from school, a further 10.5% were in their 20s, 9% in their 30s, and 4.5% in their 40s, the oldest being 45. Five had graduated with first-class honours degrees, 37 with upper seconds, nine with lower seconds, and one with a third, while 14 declined to specify. Nearly two-thirds (42) had pursued some form of postgraduate study: 15 a Masters degree, 13 a PGCE, 2 a PhD, and the remainder a range of postgraduate diplomas in areas such as law, nursing and accountancy. This is considerably higher than the approximately 30% take up by history graduates of postgraduate study nationally. It may be that postgraduates are more likely to respond to surveys of this sort because of their continuing connection with a university education. 14 were still on their courses at the time of the survey, five on a part-time basis three of them as trainee solicitors.

2000 was chosen as the sample year because in general it takes around three years for graduates to find settled employment. 49 (74%) of the history graduates were in full-time jobs and 3 were unemployed. 10 of those in employment regarded their current occupations as temporary.[xlviii] Two of these, however, had only recently completed their postgraduate degrees and had taken on part-time lecturing posts with a view to permanent academic careers. The graduates' current employment was diverse and included jobs as teachers, managers, solicitors, nurses, accountants, local government officials, conservators, countryside wardens, and sales executives. The distribution, using the Standard Occupational Classification, was as follows: managers and senior officials 7.6%, professional occupations 42.4%, associate professional and technical 13.6%, personal service 16.7%, sales and customer service 1.5%. The graduates were now therefore mostly in jobs that required a degree-qualification. Their experience confirms the findings of other surveys that show how the comparative disadvantages faced by non-vocational graduates in the labour market at the time of graduation have greatly diminished three or so years later. The level of unemployment, at 4.5%, is more than double that uncovered in the Warwick survey of graduates of 1995 but based on a much smaller and subject-specific sample.[xlix] It also represents an improvement on the situation six months after graduation when unemployment nationally for the history graduates of 2000 stood at 7%. For the 47 who provided information, the length of time in their current jobs (temporary and permanent) varied from one month to twenty years. Excluding this last case, which was somewhat anomalous,[l] 13 of the graduates had been employed for less than 6 months, 4 for 6-12 months, 10 for 1-2 years, 15 for 2-3 years, and 4 for 36-40 months.

The skills tables for graduates [see Appendix C, Tables 1 and 4] reveal a shift in importance from the more 'academic' and discipline-related at school and university to the more 'practical' and generic in employment. Reading, writing and learning how to learn, which figure in the top five of those developed in school and university, drop right down the rankings for employment-related skills to sixteenth, eighteenth and twentieth places respectively. There is a corresponding rise in practical competences and personal attributes like multitasking, teamwork, word processing, decision-making and leadership. None of these could be said to have been neglected by formal education, though competence in both leadership and teamwork rose quite significantly in employment (by mean scores of 1.16 and 1.17 respectively). The only other skills deficits of more than one grade point were using spreadsheets (where competence rose by 1.74), using databases (1.4) and creating databases (1.35). These IT applications were the three most under-developed skills at both school and university and they remained in the bottom five in employment despite the general rise in ability. Averaging scores disguises the fact that these IT skills are very much required in some of the jobs that history graduates are entering but for which their

degree does not, but could, better prepare them. As with the undergraduate cohort, the history element of their education at university was held by the graduates to have contributed only slightly less to the development of most skills than their university experience overall.

The comparative skills tables reveal evidence of graduate perceptions of their progress from school, through university into employment. The mean score for all skills by their own assessment rises from 2.69 at school to 3.57 at university and 4 in employment. Like the undergraduates, the graduates believed university had improved their overall capabilities by almost one full point on the five-point scale. Employment, however, had added very little to most skill levels, other than the five with 'deficits' of more than one grade-point referred to in the previous paragraph. By contrast, university was held by the graduates to have improved their ability in every skill except numeracy and by over one grade-point in twelve of them. The weak numerical ability of history students and graduates is an evident problem and one which, the questionnaires reveal, is receiving little or no attention in the university curriculum. On the whole, though, the graduates showed general confidence in, and satisfaction with, the development of their employability skills during their time at university.

The comparative weakness in numerical skills and the ability to create and use databases and spreadsheets may be less significant than at first sight as graduates reported that these were the least required in their current jobs. Even so, three of the IT skills – creating spreadsheets and using and creating databases – were among the top five showing the biggest deficits in skill-levels.[li] The other two were teamwork and leadership. Moreover, it may also be the case that the graduates gravitated towards particular jobs because these skills were not demanded and their lack of competence may therefore have restricted their choice and 'marketability' [see Appendix C, Table 5]. This is given some support by the differences between the skills identified by the graduates as most required in their jobs and those which employers have seen as most essential. While the latter have been inclined to prioritise numeracy, IT and problem-solving,[lii] these were not among the skills which the history graduates said were most in demand. These were, in rank order: multitasking, time management, working independently, ability to reflect, oral communication and teamwork. Only one of these – working independently – was in the top five of the skills developed at university but, as we have seen, the graduates felt that they had left university with above average capability in all of them, with the mean scores ranging from 4.31 (working independently) to 3.25 (teamwork). Overall, then, with the possible exception of teamwork, there was a satisfactory match between the skills that graduates had acquired at university and the requirements of their chosen jobs.

41% of the sample said they had developed skills outside university and paid employment. 14 different skills were mentioned, some several times. Leadership (14), teamwork (11) and IT (8) were the most common, the rest being alluded to just once – presentational, writing, task management, evaluation, oral, problem solving, interpersonal, hand skills (conservation) – or twice - numeracy, creativity. They were developed through participation in social and sports clubs, the girl guides, charitable and voluntary work, travelling and the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme. On a scale of 1 (basic) to 5 (highly developed), most scored above average with 13 rated at level 5, 24 at level 4, 6 at level 3 and 2 at level 2.

Sixteen graduates took the opportunity to comment on their skills development. Two stressed the contribution made by postgraduate study and two the experience gained prior to entering university. One said that university had given

them great confidence and 'a thirst for learning'. The most common response was to underline the ways in which employment had honed their skills. For example, one noted that 'My skills developed most rapidly once I started work as there is a steep learning curve in my job. However, all this built on solid foundations acquired earlier.' The comments confirmed some of the points that arose from analysis of the skills data – that practical, often job-related skills became increasingly demanded and that, while history is particularly good at developing analytical, research and writing skills, there is room for improvement elsewhere. One graduate referred in this context to 'oral communication, teamwork, thinking on your feet and taking on responsibility', and another to the need for improving computing skills beyond basic word processing. Finally, one comment neatly encapsulated the difficulties in tracking skills development – 'It is hard to separate *where* one picks up each skill, but certainly studying history underpins how my skills have developed' – thereby neatly affirming the importance of the contribution made by history to employability while gently reminding us that diagnosing precisely how it does so is inevitably problematic and somewhat artificial.

Only one graduate reported that their university course had included a work placement – one day per week at a school throughout the third year. 52 (80%) had had work experience before university in largely elementary (32%), sales (28%) or administrative (23%) jobs, ranging in time from less than one month (4.2%), 1-6 months (15.5%), 6-12 months (24%), 1-2 years (21.1%) and over 2 years (35.2%). 49 (74%) continued with part-time employment while at university at an average of 1.5 jobs each. Once again these were largely in the elementary (44%), sales (34.7%) and administrative (9.3%) categories. The time employed in each ranged from less than one month (7%), 1-6 months (19.3%), 6-12 months (35.1%), 1-2 years (17.5%), to over 2 years (21.1%).

Up to six new skills had been learnt by individual graduates as a result of their work experience before and at university. Teamwork was by far and away the most frequently mentioned (33 times), followed by interpersonal/social skills (15), leadership/responsibility (11), oral communication (10), time management (9), IT (8), presentational (6), hard work under pressure (5), numeracy (4), organisational (4), financial management (2), initiative (2), research (2) and, just once: data analysis, motivation, teaching, networking, problem-solving, decision-making, setting and meeting targets, multitasking and self-evaluation. Yet, in only one case was this experience recognised by way of course-credits – and this was the solitary case of the student (at Staffordshire University) who had undertaken a work placement as part of their degree programme. As with the undergraduates, extra-curricular work experience was usefully supplementing course-related skills and merits more consideration in curricular planning than it is afforded at the present time.

Take up of careers advice while at university had been patchy – fewer than half (46%) of the cohort had taken it, 38.5% knew it was available but had not sought it, while 15.5% said they had been given no advice whatsoever. As with the undergraduates, this suggests ignorance, rather than the absence, of a careers service, for all the universities provided one. However, it also suggests that more could be done to promulgate careers advice. Only in the case of one institution – Warwick – were all its graduates aware of its availability. Moreover, of those who had sought advice, one-third did not find it at all useful, rating it 1 on a scale of 1 to 5. A further 40% rated it 2, 20% at 3, 6.7% at 4, while not one student rated it 5.

When asked how their history degree had helped prepare them for the world of work, the typical response was to remark on how skills touched on earlier in the

questionnaire had been transferred to the workplace. Working with, and appreciating the views of, other people were also thought to have helped. Several graduates said their degree had instilled confidence and responsibility and one praised the 'structured learning' they had experienced. Only one said that their university experience had not helped much. The tone was almost wholly positive, as in the case of the Trade Administrative Systems Coordinator who wrote: 'History has given me a head start with the skills my employer requires, so much so I am out-performing a business graduate doing the same job as myself in a fundamentally business environment.'
As for their career ambitions, a history degree had been directly useful in the case of ten graduates who had gone on to teach the subject and for a further four for whom it was a necessary stepping stone to their postgraduate programmes. Others, too, believed it had helped secure them the jobs they desired – two journalists, an academic librarian, a conservator and an FE admissions officer; and two who thought their ability to undertake research and work independently had been important. Three valued their qualification because it gave them enough skills to keep their career options open. A mature student had changed his career ambitions completely after graduating, one remarked on how 'peoples' attitudes changed because I had a degree', and another believed his skills had helped secure him promotion. This last, however, observed that his skills had not been recognised at the time of his appointment, adding that 'Employers don't appreciate the variety of skills that history graduates have to offer.' Only two felt their degree had not helped with their career ambitions, one of them remarking 'I wish now I'd taken a vocational degree'.

Like the undergraduates, the graduates valued the contribution of history to other aspects of their lives for the enhanced understanding it gave them of the world and of current events. Second to that was their ability to evaluate and justify arguments. Several appreciated the leisure value of history either when travelling or as fuelling an ongoing interest in, and enjoyment of, the past. The role played by history in developing their confidence, social skills, tolerance, patience and sense of worth were all mentioned. Comments included: 'It helped me grow as an individual'; 'It completely transformed my knowledge and outlook'; 'It helped me manage my home and work life'; and 'It enabled me to educate others by sharing my knowledge'.

Famous Graduates

History graduates enter a wide range of careers and many have risen to the very top. A remarkable number have gone on to become the movers-and-shakers of modern-day Britain. In recent years history graduates have held the following key positions in civil society: chancellor of the exchequer, chair of the BBC Board of Governors, vice-chancellor and chancellor of Oxford University, chairman of the joint intelligence committee and head of MI6, director of the National Criminal Intelligence Service, General Secretary of the TUC, chairman of Manchester United, Olympic champion and world record holder, and heir to the throne. They have as well become celebrated lawyers, press barons, well-known television and newspaper journalists, famous comedians and entertainers, award-winning authors, heads of advisory bodies and charities, directors of major museums, top diplomats and civil servants, chief constables, high ranking officers in the armed forces, and business millionaires. This last is perhaps the most surprising, but it is a matter of fact that history graduates have, in recent times, held proportionately more directorships of Britain's major companies than graduates of any other subject.[liii] One reason for including famous graduates in the survey was to demonstrate that a history education

was not a bar to progress in a multiplicity of careers. It was hoped that the experiences of, and encouragement from, successful history graduates would persuade students to continue with history to GCSE and beyond. The questionnaire was therefore designed to elicit comments from famous graduates in the hope that these would be positive and could be used to add colour to the materials distributed to pupils choosing options at age 14. It was therefore structured slightly differently to the other questionnaires and was also shorter in the hope that this would elicit more responses. Nevertheless, with regard to the key questions concerning skills development, the questionnaire covered the same terrain and thereby yielded useful comparative data.

The famous graduates had taken their first degrees at a diverse range of universities: 67 English, 9 Scottish, 2 Welsh, 2 in Northern Ireland, one South African and one in the USA. Two did not specify. Of the 80 who had studied at British universities, 22 had been at Oxbridge, 31 at other old universities, 25 at 1960s 'new' universities, and 2 at 1990s new universities (former polytechnics). 18 had gone on to take postgraduate degrees. 75 (89%) were male – evidence, perhaps, of the persistence of the glass ceiling obstructing the rise of women to the very top. Of the 71 who declared their degree classification, 23 (32.4%) had gained firsts, 29 (54.9%) upper seconds,[liv] 8 (11.3%) lower seconds and one (1.4%) a third.

Occupational breakdown is complicated by the fact that several of the famous graduates have had more than one job – for example, lawyers who have entered politics; politicians who have come from or gone into business etc. Some have retired from their principal occupation but are still active – as non-executive directors, members of charitable trusts and so forth. The following classification is based on the jobs with which they are most familiarly associated: business/finance 17, education 13, media/journalism 12, civil service 12, politics 8, public service sector 4, police 3, law 2, local government 2, museums/archives 2, authors 2, TUC 1, armed forces 1. Transferring this to the Standard Occupational Classification produces the following distribution: managers and senior officials 59 (69.4%), professional 9 (10.6%), associate professional and technical 14 (16.5%), administrative 2 (2.4%).

Asked how their history education had helped prepare them for their careers, virtually all of the famous graduates made reference to particular skills that had been invaluable. The most frequently mentioned were the ability to read quickly and effectively, research a topic and absorb and process large amounts of information, think deeply about a subject, develop and defend cogent arguments and communicate one's findings clearly. As Roderic Lyne, Britain's Ambassador to Russia, succinctly put it: '…the key value was to develop skills of gathering and analysing evidence, and developing and presenting – orally and in writing – arguments based on it. I am still using that methodology 34 years later.' Almost all, as well, made reference to the way in which studying history had helped them understand current events, gave them a perspective on the modern world, and helped them handle issues which arose in their working lives. Helen McMurray's response was typical of many: 'As a television producer working in topical daily broadcasting, I don't think a day goes by when I don't draw on my sense of historical perspective.' A leading diplomat cited Orwell to make a similar point about the importance of history: 'Who controls the past, controls the future.' Orwell, of course, recognised that history could be used for evil ends but Sir Kenneth Carlisle was emphatic that the study of history was necessary for exactly the opposite reason: 'In a healthy country its citizens will understand their history.'

As an adjunct to this emphasis on skills and understanding, several of the famous graduates emphasised how history had given them breadth of knowledge, objectivity and the ability to engage with different points of view. These qualities had

led Frances Crook into her career with the Howard League for Penal Reform: '…empathy with the human condition, passion for social justice, belief in essential good of humanity and that we can make it better'. History also helped broaden knowledge because of its relationship to other disciplines – art, architecture, culture, politics, sociology, religion, geography and economics were variously mentioned. A company director wrote: 'It touches on many other key subjects that have benefited me in my business career e.g. politics, economics, geography, art and culture.' Similarly, the educationalist Peter Scott observed that 'History provides an ideal balance between the humanities and social sciences, so it helps to develop empathy, intuition and similar qualities but (hopefully) in a relatively intellectual framework.' And such knowledge was vital in informing judgement and decision-making. The writer Andrew Morton was of the view that a history education 'helps with judgement and at the top level judgement counts more than knowledge'; while Suzanne Warner of the Broadcasting Standards Commission wrote that 'It showed the timelessness of factors which affect decision-making.' All-in-all, history was not a bar to progressing in a large variety of careers and its catholicity of content and skills opened up many options. As the businessman David Lyon, perhaps somewhat hyperbolically, put it: 'A history degree disqualifies you from nothing.'

Many of the famous graduates made reference to the direct relevance of history to their own careers. Journalists, politicians, diplomats and those who had started out as academic historians were the most likely to make this connection. For example, Jeremy Bowen, BBC correspondent, noted that history had given him 'an understanding of the modern world invaluable for a journalist'. But it was also mentioned as important to careers where the relevance might appear less immediate. The Bishop of London, Richard Chartres, suggested that 'a knowledge of history diverts the pressure of the passing moment. It liberates us from a sense that where we find ourselves is inevitable. It alerts us to the need to make choices and the influence of those choices in the past on the present.' Another bishop referred to how history gave him 'a sense of encouragement'. Michael Mansfield QC, dubbed by one newspaper 'the most famous lawyer in the land',[lv] saw history's value to his career in terms of 'Careful background research – historical contexts for legislation – importance of chronology and prime sources.' The television presenter Timmy Mallett had drawn directly on his historical knowledge in his broadcasts aimed at children: 'The stories in history were the ones I used throughout *Wacaday*. History is about people and getting on with people is the secret of a good career.' Air Vice-Marshall Peter Collins wrote: '…as promotion and seniority required more and more significant staff work activities and involvement in the development of policy, I am convinced that my study of history and the skills of analysis and presentation which it involved were critical to my success.' Sir Roy Strong, who, as Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum, had reshaped its exhibitions policy, reflected on how 'you have to go back to go forward – to revivify a great institution you must go back to its foundations and recast from that'. 'As a civil servant,' David Edmonds, the Director-General of Oftel, observed, 'the ability to gather facts, to assess their strength and to draw conclusions from them is essential. This degree was an excellent grounding in that.' Finally, for one respondent, the television newscaster and historical novelist Tom Bradby, 'History has been the foundation of everything I have done.'

In terms of their reflections on their skills education, the famous graduates ranked reading, multitasking, time management, numeracy and, fifth equal, working independently and leadership as the ones most developed at school [see Appendix C, Tables 1 and 6]. Two of these – reading and leadership – remained in their top five for

university, with ability to reflect (in first place), learning how to learn (second) and working independently (fourth) now joining them. The appearance of leadership here is interesting for it was rated much lower by the other cohorts. Perhaps it is indicative of a natural aptitude for leadership among the famous graduates and a willingness to take up positions of responsibility from an early age. As with the undergraduate and graduate cohorts, there was a significant, though not quite as large, improvement in all-round capability at university with the total mean score rising by 0.48. The biggest rises – by more than one grade-point – were in working independently, writing, reflection, learning how to learn, collect/record data, synthesise data, ability to evaluate and leadership. That the several IT skills were in the bottom five at both school and university is hardly surprising as they simply did not exist when the famous graduates were in formal education. Many, though by no means all, had, in recent years as the technology had become available, developed IT skills, especially word processing and use of the internet, but four of these skills remained firmly rooted in the bottom five developed in employment. The other was numeracy which had fallen quite dramatically in the rankings from fifth place at school to nineteenth at university and twentieth in employment. Even so, the famous graduates assessed their skill level higher in employment than at school. Indeed, the only skill that was being less developed now than during their time in education was reading, though their proficiency here is not in question. Unlike the graduates, the famous graduates reported an even bigger increase in overall competence during employment than while at university, with the total mean score rising by almost one full grade-point (0.87). This can in part be accounted for by the late development of IT skills, though not entirely – teamwork, oral communication, numeracy, presentational skills, preparation and research, problem-solving, multitasking and decision-making were all also held to have improved quite considerably during employment. In all these cases, the undergraduates and graduates rated their skill-levels higher at university than did the famous graduates, providing some evidence that teaching of generic skills has improved. The biggest rise in the skill-levels of famous graduates was in the ability to work as part of a team, from a mean score of 2.4 at university to 4.51 in employment, reinforcing the finding that came from the audit of graduate skills. The statistics suggest that there are ways in which the curricula at school and university could be inflected to address skills shortcomings but, by the same token, that skills teaching at university has improved in recent years and that no dramatic changes are needed. Moreover, even without the benefits of any such improvements, the famous graduates were reasonably well-skilled at graduation and, self-evidently, their education in this regard had been no bar to their subsequent success.

Only one of the 84 famous graduates reported that their course had included a work placement and this was someone who had had teaching experience as part of an education diploma taken alongside their degree. 56%, however, had had part-time jobs while at university. Nine of the famous graduates said they had developed absolutely no skills as a result of their experiences. Some of them, however, identified as many as three new skills, the most frequently mentioned (15 times) being interpersonal/social/customer service skills. The others were teaching (5), journalism/writing (4), teamwork (3), management (2), time management (2), and financial skills, negotiation, patience, supervisory skills, 'alert to being cheated' and 'streetwise skills'. Manual, job-related capabilities were also mentioned – for example, cleaning, bricklaying, labouring, typing and painting. None of this part-time work was course accredited.

81 of the famous graduates said they had maintained an interest in history; the other three did not answer this question. Ten did not find this continuing interest of any direct help with their day-to-day jobs, though it helped indirectly as a form of relaxation in their leisure time and by giving them a perspective in which to situate their working lives. The vast majority, however, thought it was of direct relevance. David Lyon, former chief executive of Rexam, a company with annual sales of £3 billion, observed that 'Understanding the past helps in facilitating change in organisations'; John Monks, General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation: 'I use history daily to explain what is going on to others'; John Tusa, managing director of the Barbican Centre: 'Historical skills and approach are essential to my job'; Gerald Corbett, chairman of Woolworths plc: 'In a business career, being able to analyse a particular problem, make a case and communicate it quickly and succinctly are key skills, and these are what you acquire studying history'; while Bill Neely emphasised history's quotidian value for a television journalist: 'Always history repeats itself…. We live it every day.'

Composite Skills Data

Merging the data from the four cohorts and comparing the findings with those from cognate surveys produces a still more comprehensive picture of the part played by a history education in skills development. The final four columns of Table 1 in Appendix C present the total mean skill scores for the 315 men and 225 women who took part in the survey: all 540 at school, 341 at university and 150 in employment. The column for 'History' represents the assessment by all except the famous graduates of the specific part played by history in their skills development. The skills scores are also displayed in rank order in Table 7.

It can be seen from these statistics that a history education is exceptionally good at developing two of the three 'Rs' – reading and 'riting – but not the third – 'rithmetic. Numerical capability remains, on the whole, poorly developed throughout, though the demands of employment force some improvement. By contrast, the core academic skills of reading and writing are in the top three skills for 'school', 'university' and 'history'. In employment, however, they appear way down the rankings, in nineteenth and sixteenth places respectively. This does not represent any decline in competence, rather the rise in importance in employment of other skills. The five which are developed most in employment are, in rank order: multitasking, time management, teamwork, working independently and oral communication. On the whole, a history education cultivates these skills to a reasonably satisfactory level though it seems that more could be done to improve teamwork and oral skills where there were skills deficits of over one grade point. The total mean scores for these competences of just over 3 (satisfactory) indicate that a fair proportion of respondents rated their abilities at or below average – 45.3% of undergraduates and 67.7% of graduates for teamwork and 42.8% and 45.4% respectively for oral skills. There is an even greater skills deficit when it comes to leadership, sixth equal in 'employment' but languishing at twentieth in the 'history' list almost two grade points lower. A similar point can be made regarding the related skill of decision-making, though the gap in competence between university and employment is narrower at one grade-point.

Like numeracy, the several IT skills are poorly developed by a history education, though competence in word processing and use of the internet is satisfactory by the time of graduation and history appears to have played more of a

role than university education generally in achieving this (perhaps indicating the extent to which these skills have been 'built-in' rather than 'bolted-on' to history courses). On the other hand, history students have as yet little experience of working with databases and spreadsheets.

On a more positive note, it is encouraging to find that a history education develops well the higher cognitive skills of reflexivity and learning how to learn. Many of the famous graduates remarked on the ways in which history taught them to think and provided a good foundation upon which they were able to build their careers. The capacity to reflect and to continue to learn from experience are vital skills that will serve throughout life and which are critical to employability.

The merged data also confirm the progressive nature of skills development apparent from the analyses of the separate cohorts. According to their own estimation, the overall skills of the university-educated had improved by one-half of a grade point over their level of attainment at school. Improvement by the same margin occurred as well in employment. This progress is unsurprising in the context of experience, education and maturity but the data show it to be a relatively steady, cumulative process, which is as it should be.

It is instructive to compare these results with those found in the PITAR and CHERI surveys. Although history was not their sole focus, they reinforce some of the key findings of this survey. The following table shows the top five self-reported skills of students at the time of graduation according to the three surveys:

PITAR	CHERI	PRESENT SURVEY
1. Working independently	1. Writing	1. Reading
2. Reading	2. Learning abilities	2. Working independently
3. Working under pressure	3. Working independently	3. Writing
4. Writing	4. Knowledge	4. Learning to learn
5. Learning abilities	5= Critical thinking	5. Evaluation
	5= Reflective thinking	
	5= Creativity	
	5= Tolerance	

[*Sources*: PITAR report, p.2; Brennan et al, *The English Degree*, Appendix 2, Charts 1a & 1b, pp. 42-3; Present Survey, Appendix C, Table 1]

The consistency of these findings leaves little doubt that most students, including history students, feel very well accomplished by the time of their graduation in four skills: reading, writing, working independently and learning how to learn.[lvi]

The three surveys also reveal parallels in terms of the skills most required in the workplace as reported by graduates. These are, in rank order:

PITAR	CHERI	PRESENT SURVEY
1. Time management	1. Oral communication	1. Multitasking
2. Working under pressure	2. Working under pressure	2. Time management
3. Accuracy	3. Accuracy	3. Work independently
4. Oral communication	4. Teamwork	4. Ability to reflect
5. Multitasking	5. Time management	5= Teamwork
		5= Oral communication

[*Sources*: PITAR, *Report*, p.2; Brennan et al, *The Employment of UK Graduates*, p.25; Present Survey, Appendix C, Table 5]

They show considerable agreement about the skills in demand in employment: notably, time management, oral communication, accuracy, multitasking, teamwork and working under pressure. However, only two of these – communication and teamwork – are among the list of skills most frequently emphasised by employers.[lvii] The present survey has shown history students to be deficient at teamwork and, to a lesser extent, oral communication skills. PITAR also found a deficit in oral communication skills and in teamwork. Both PITAR and CHERI found time management to be under-developed among graduates but this was not found to be the case in the present survey. Here, the biggest competency gaps – that is, the difference between the skills at graduation and the skills required in employment – reported by the graduates of 2000 were, in rank order: creating spreadsheets, teamwork, using databases, creating databases and leadership. Finally, PITAR reported that there was a deficit in IT skills among the employed graduates surveyed but that skill levels here were improving, an observation supported by the present survey.[lviii]

Personality Profiles

There is a long history in educational psychology of interest in, and disagreement about, the effect of personality upon learning and achievement. Put starkly, the debate is one about 'nature' versus 'nurture', and arguments have revolved around the weight that should be attached in education to, on the one hand, individual and personality, and on the other, environmental and contextual, factors. Its influence can be seen in the positions taken upon such major issues in educational policy as comprehensive versus selective provision or in the literature on passive versus active approaches to learning. In recent years, it is probably fair to say that policy and practice have been more influenced by an emphasis on nurture rather than nature. However, the contribution made by individual personality to both teaching and learning has continued to interest, and divide, psychologists. Its importance is examined in W. Roy Crozier's *Individual Learners. Personality differences in education* (Routledge, 1997), an excellent introduction to the subject. Crozier places particular emphasis on five key personality traits: aggressiveness, anxiety, motivation, self-confidence and shyness. For the present purpose, what is crucial about the research on personality and learning is the importance which it assigns to the role of agency in learning. As Crozier puts it: 'the person is not the passive product of genes or environment but strives to make sense of his or her experiences and acts in the light of expectations of the future' (p. xv). Whatever the pros and cons of the wider debate, therefore, it should not be controversial to assert that students learn best when they are engaged, self-motivated, self-confident, active agents in their own learning, though how these qualities are best mobilised is more problematic. As we have seen , finding ways to encourage efficacy beliefs is central to the ESECT model 'employability' curriculum.

An adjunct of the longstanding interest in personality and learning has been the attempt to establish some correlation between particular personality types and 'genius' or exceptional creativity and achievement. A key finding in research on creative individuals has been the importance of motivation in explaining their success and, once again, self-efficacy has been shown to play an important role here, in determining what individuals choose to do and their commitment and perseverance at

their chosen activities.[lix] One such study, on the relationship between personality and achievement, is of especial interest to historians for it makes explicit claims about the tendency of history students towards a particular personality type which, further research has suggested, has a bearing on their employment capabilities. For this reason, this body of work merits closer consideration here.

In 'a psychological study of the English schoolboy' published nearly forty years ago, Liam Hudson distinguished between two broad personality types – what he called 'convergers' and 'divergers'. Convergers were distinguished by high IQs and a very focused approach to problems, divergers by, for the most part, lower IQs but with a wider-ranging approach to problems that would more likely yield novel solutions. By way of a series of personality tests on 'A' level students, Hudson found that they covered the spectrum from 'extreme divergers' (10%) and 'moderate divergers' (20%) to 'extreme convergers' (10%) and 'moderate convergers' (20%). The other 40% were 'all-rounders'. He concluded that those following 'hard' physical science were more likely to be convergers while those studying arts subjects were more likely to be divergers. And, of all subject-groups, history students were the most pronounced of the divergers. The psychological traits associated with these personality types were present in schoolboys by the time they were 14 or 15 and were even more defined by university age.[lx]

A generation later, Richard Barry, in a survey of company directors carried out on behalf of the Royal Academy of Engineering and the Engineering Council, drew upon Hudson's work in order to explain an apparent anomaly – namely, the disproportionate number of history graduates in relation to all graduates who were represented on the boards of directors of Britain's top one hundred companies. Barry explained their success in reaching the 'commanding heights of the economy' by reference to their divergent personalities. He had followed up Hudson's work by giving a personality profiling test to engineering and history undergraduates, and the results had confirmed Hudson's hypothesis. Barry summed up the characteristics of divergers and convergers as follows:

Divergers	*Convergers*
intuitive	realistic
tense	placid
disorderly	perfectionist
sceptical	trusting
iconoclastic	conservative
emotionally volatile	calm
ideas-oriented	solution-oriented
non-conformist	rule-conscious
warm	emotionally distant
socially pushy	shy
individualistic	group oriented[lxi]

The present project afforded an opportunity to assemble more data on the personality profiles of history students and to see whether or not the results confirmed Hudson's thesis. Given the scope of the project, it was not practical to administer the detailed personality profiling tests that Hudson had employed. Instead, the questionnaires invited respondents to select from a list of traits, those that they believed best described their personalities. The limitations of this methodology, based as it is upon subjective responses and upon the aggregation of characteristics

identified by respondents rather than the profiling of each individual, are recognised and the following analysis of the data must be read with this caveat in mind.

The twenty-two characteristics listed in the questionnaire were those identified by Barry apart from two minor modifications: the rather less pejorative 'radical' was substituted for 'iconoclastic' and 'socially confident' for 'socially pushy'. The respondents were asked to choose as many as they wished from an undifferentiated list rather than from pairs of divergent and convergent characteristics. To group them in such a way would have been artificial for individual personalities can consist of supposedly 'contrary' characteristics.

The full results are tabulated in Appendix D. However, the following table presents the characteristics that were selected by over 30% (which was close to the median)[lxii] of each cohort, showing their rank order:

	School	*Undergraduate*	*Graduate*	*Famous Graduate*	*All*
Intuitive	9	8	5	5	7
Realistic	1	1	1	1	1
Perfectionis	5=		7=	9=	10
Sceptical	4	7	7=		5
Trusting	3	4	9=	11=	6
Radical				11=	
Calm	8	6		9=	8
Ideas-oriented	10		6	3	7
Solution-oriented	9=	4			
Non-conformist				6=	
Warm	5=	3	2=	3	3
Socially confident	2	2	2=	2	2
Individualistic	5=	5	4	6=	4

School history students were inclined towards divergent personality types. Of the eleven pairs of divergent and convergent characteristics, they inclined towards the convergent in just three of them, while seven were divergent and one neutral. Of the ten characteristics identified most frequently (that is, chosen by over 30% of the sample), six were divergent. The ten in rank order were: realistic, socially confident, trusting, sceptical, warm, individualistic, perfectionist, calm, intuitive and ideas-oriented.

The inclination towards divergence is much less clear-cut for the undergraduate cohort. Here, comparing the ratio of divergent to convergent characteristics, six of the latter were higher, four of the former and one was neutral. Eight characteristics were each selected by over 30% of the undergraduates. They were, in rank order: realistic, socially confident, warm, trusting, individualistic, calm, sceptical and intuitive. Five of these are of the divergent type.

A similar pattern emerges from the graduate data. No clear personality type can be discerned from the diverger:converger ratios with the former higher in five cases and the latter in six. The characteristics most frequently chosen were, in rank order: realistic, socially confident, warm, individualistic, intuitive, ideas-oriented, perfectionist, sceptical, solution-oriented and trusting. Six of these ten are of the divergent type.

If it is indeed the case that divergent personalities make successful managers and business people and that students of history show a marked tendency towards divergence, then we would expect to find such divergence most clearly evident among our famous graduates. Intriguingly, this proves to be the case. Of the eleven pairs of

characteristics, the divergent preponderated in seven of them and the convergent in just three, while one was neutral. Moreover, eight of the twelve characteristics that over 30% of the famous graduates chose to describe themselves were from the divergent range. The twelve were, in rank order: realistic, socially confident, ideas-oriented, solution-oriented, intuitive, non-conformist, individualistic, warm, calm, perfectionist, trusting and radical. It is interesting that the famous graduates were the only cohort that included a significant number of radical and non-conformist personalities.[lxiii]

Apart from these two, it can be seen that there is a great deal of commonality in the identification of personality traits by the respective cohorts. All four had six characteristics in common: intuitive, realistic, trusting, warm, socially confident and individualistic. Realistic and socially confident came first and second respectively in all four lists. Four more characteristics were shared by three of the groups: perfectionist, sceptical, calm and ideas-oriented. When the data for all the cohorts is merged, the top ten characteristics, each identified by over 30% of the sample, were, in rank order: realistic, socially confident, warm, individualistic, sceptical, trusting, intuitive, calm, ideas-oriented, and perfectionist. Four of these are convergent and six divergent. The latter also had a slight majority in the pairing ratios: preponderant in five of them with two neutral.

While the evidence suggests that there may be some substance to Hudson's thesis, much more research is needed before any firm conclusions can be drawn. The subjective findings above need to be supported by personality tests and judged in the context of comparative data from other subject areas. More work also needs to be done on what might be termed 'negative' personality traits – such as aggressiveness – and their role in employability. Little attention has been paid in the literature on employability to this issue or, indeed, to the role of personal psychology generally in helping or hindering success in particular careers, despite the fact that many employers now routinely use psychometric tests and several surveys have reported that graduates believe their personalities counted for much more than their skills in getting and keeping their jobs. An exception, as we have seen, can be found in the ESECT emphasis on the critical need to devise curricula that encourage efficacy beliefs. It does seem to be the case that strong motivation, self-belief and self-confidence are strongly linked to success both in education and beyond. As for our tentative foray into Hudson territory, all that can be said is that many of the historians sampled here described themselves as realistic, socially confident, warm, individualistic and sceptical. Most did not regard themselves as emotionally distant, emotionally volatile, radical, tense, disorderly, conservative, rule-conscious or placid. In terms of 'contrary imaginations', they were 3.6 times more likely to be warm than distant, 2.4 times more calm than volatile, 2.2 times more perfectionist than disorderly, and twice more likely to be confident than shy.

Summary of Main Conclusions and Recommendations

- History teaches many of the key employability skills. Graduates of the subject are particularly strong in the core academic skills of reading and writing. The discipline also burnishes their ability to work independently and to research and evaluate. Perhaps most importantly, history graduates believe themselves to be generally good at the ability to reflect and at learning how to learn, high level pedagogic capabilities that are extremely valuable, not only in employment but

throughout life, for they underpin the ability to adapt to new circumstances and challenges and grow with and mould change.[lxiv]

- History students are generally well skilled for the jobs they enter. The skills they identify as most in demand in their employment have for the most part been developed to a good standard by their education. In addition to learning abilities and the ability to work independently, these include multitasking, time management, and the ability to reflect, to assess a situation and adapt to it. The evidence suggests that history has always taught useful generic skills, whether accidentally or serendipitously, and without the need for any special attention to 'key skills'. Indeed, one comparative survey showed that while history departments were paying the least attention to employability issues, somewhat perversely their graduates were above average in acknowledging the use they were making in employment of transferable skills acquired at university.[lxv] Moreover, the data assembled here point to a general improvement in the teaching of generic skills to today's history students when compared with the skill-levels at university of the famous graduates – most strikingly, of course, in IT because that simply did not exist when the famous graduates were at university. But improvement is also evident in most of the other skills, the only exceptions being creative thinking, ability to reflect, learning how to learn, leadership and, marginally, the ability to synthesise data. However, this is not a recipe for complacency. The evidence also suggests that history could do more to prepare its students for some of the main skills required in their chosen careers – most notably, leadership, decision-making, teamwork and oral communication. The history curriculum has evolved in recent years to offer students the opportunity to develop these skills – for example, through group projects and class presentations – and the most recent assessments by current undergraduates suggest there has been some improvement, but more could be done to embed them successfully within and across the curriculum. In a recent comparative survey of the employability skills of the graduates of five subjects, history ranked lowest in terms of those who had experienced team or group project work, and lowest also in the provision of other key skills such as communication, problem solving and IT.[lxvi] University history departments need to be particularly alert to any deficiencies in teamwork and oral communication as these are among the generic skills specified in the History Benchmark Statement.
- The skills at which history students excel only match in part those most in demand by employers. Of the latter, numeracy, leadership and some of the IT skills are being developed to less than satisfactory levels while teamwork and oral communication skills are about average. History appears very good at delivering one of the four key skills that Dearing targeted for all undergraduates - namely, 'learning how to learn' – but could do more with regard to the other three: communication (oral), IT and numeracy. It may be the case that history graduates are finding jobs that match their skills but that the range of opportunities open to them and their 'marketability' would be increased if their skill-levels were raised in these under-developed areas.
- With regard to IT skills, significant progress has been made in incorporating word processing and use of the internet into the history curriculum but history students have little or no experience in using spreadsheets and databases. As these have practical applications in historical study, it is not difficult to see how they could be incorporated into the curriculum. To do so would at the same time help address the deficiency in numerical capability.

- One of the most effective ways to prepare students for employment is to provide them with the opportunity for some structured work experience. At the moment, however, only a very few history students are given, or avail themselves of, such an opportunity. Only 16 (6.2%) of the 257 undergraduates and recent graduates surveyed had followed a work experience course as part of their history programme. While the number of such courses has increased in recent years, they are still very much the exception, despite the fact that their contribution to employability has been widely recognised not just by employers but in academic studies and in feedback from the students themselves. A recent survey of six old university history departments found that they attached very little importance to work experience and that not one of their graduates had been involved in work placements as part of their programmes.[lxvii] There is still, therefore, a lot of work to be done if employability issues are to be given serious consideration in curriculum planning. The thrust of this report has been to suggest that this will be best achieved by incremental improvements to learning and teaching. Attempts to ram skills down unwilling throats – whether from 'above' by institutional managers or 'below' by proselytising teachers – are usually resented and resisted. Lasting and effective change is more likely to come through the gradual dissemination of good and effective practice. A useful starting point and a source of ideas and inspiration for those thinking about introducing employability-oriented courses is the compendium of existing initiatives compiled by Pauline Elkes on behalf of the Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology.[lxviii]
- In addition to lecturer indifference, a more widespread adoption of work experience courses has been limited by logistical and resource constraints. They are difficult and time consuming to set up, run and assess, and are dependent on a sizeable pool of committed employers. Moreover, the survey has shown that students do not see the opportunity for work experience as significant in determining their choice of university; the benefits only become apparent later, when they have tried such courses. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that they remain a minority experience. However, one way forward would be to find ways of recognising the work experience and other extra-curricular activities that students find for themselves. Around four out of five history students now engage in some form of part-time work,[lxix] before or at university or both. The quality of this experience varies considerably, but this survey suggests that it can develop a number of skills, in many cases to a high level and including some, such as leadership, responsibility, teamwork, oral communication and IT, that are not as well-developed as they should be in the formal curriculum. A consultation exercise carried out by the government in the summer of 2004 found that one of the strongest messages from students was for extra-curricular skills to be recognised.[lxx] Likewise, three-quarters of employers in a recent survey of 200 of the UK's top businesses said they preferred to recruit candidates who had undertaken some voluntary (as opposed to paid) work experience.[lxxi] This is an area that needs careful consideration but it certainly merits more attention in curriculum planning than it has as yet been given, including the possibilities of building in a progressive way on the work experience that is now a requirement in schools and on the 'wider activities' that the Tomlinson Report recommends should be included in the proposed new diploma structure. Personal development plans and progress files afford an opportunity for students to describe and reflect on these wider experiences but a more structured approach to recognising and assessing their contribution to overall education, such as accrediting appropriate experiential learning, will be needed in higher education as well as in schools if they are to have any real impact.

- There is a steady improvement in the capabilities of history students from school to employment, and especially at university. School students have rather more confidence in their abilities at the time than in retrospect. While much attention has focussed on the transition from university to employment and a lot of ink has been spilt on addressing ways in which to ease this transition, comparatively little consideration has been given to the transition from 'A' level to undergraduate study.[lxxii] This survey suggests that there is a greater skills gap here than at the other end. There has been far too little dialogue between schoolteachers and university lecturers aimed at easing curricular progression for students. Much of what little dialogue there has been has focussed on knowledge content rather than skills, some of it of a negative sort, with lecturers carping about the excessive attention devoted to the twentieth-century dictators. The Tomlinson review of the 14-19 curriculum and the parallel review being undertaken by the Historical Association offer an opportunity to re-think the issue of progression in the history curriculum from school to university. In any such review, skills should be considered alongside the more familiar preoccupation with questions of content and methodology.
- The contributors to the survey were consistent in emphasising the things that they value most about studying history – its training of an analytical and critical mind, the understanding it gives of current events and of other cultures, the capacity to weigh arguments and respect different viewpoints and to engage in social intercourse. In other words, a history education teaches and, hopefully, inculcates humane values and this remains the main justification for its study, not its utility or otherwise in priming students for employment. It was these values that many of the famous graduates were affirming when they acknowledged the prior importance of studying history over a more vocational education in shaping their careers and their lives in general.
- Indeed, there is much virtue in keeping career options open and having, before specialising, a broad and humane education that trains the mind. This is one reason why making history optional at 14 is to be castigated. A history qualification is not a bar and can be a boon to career progress. History students have very diverse employment aspirations, they enter many different careers and some are eminently successful, as the survey of famous graduates shows.
- However, more could be done to advise students about the wide range of careers open to them. The survey uncovered two broad concerns about the current provision of careers advice: on the one hand, there is a worrying number of students who are not availing themselves of it (a sizeable minority ignorant even of its existence); on the other, too many students who sought advice did not find it especially helpful. At school, 62% had taken advice but only 30% of these had rated it above average; 50% of undergraduates had sought advice but only 38.4% of them had rated it more than satisfactory; and 46% of the graduates had availed themselves of it while at university but only a paltry 6.7% found it to have been more than satisfactory. While these statistics suggest that there may have been some improvement in the penetration and effectiveness of careers advice in the past four years, there is clearly still much more that could be done, including more effective implementation of the recommendations of the Harris Report on the careers service. (DfEE, 2001). However, it should be pointed out that these findings are quite different to those reported for all graduates in the most recent *UK Graduate Careers Survey 2003* which found that 67% of graduates had used their university careers service and nearly three-quarters of them rated it as either 'excellent' or 'good', a declining figure but compensated by greater use of online careers advice. The responsibility for the

rather poorer experience of the history students in this sample should not automatically be laid at the doors of hard-pressed and often understaffed careers offices. Academics need to be better versed in the career opportunities of their subject and more effective in ensuring that their students are apprised of such information.

- In terms of their personality-types, there is some evidence to support Liam Hudson's thesis that history students are more likely to be 'divergers' than 'convergers', but more research is needed on this, and on the relationship between individual psychology and employability generally, before any firm conclusions can be drawn. What can be said is that the historians who contributed to this survey were more likely to describe themselves as realistic, socially confident, warm, individualistic and sceptical than to see themselves as emotionally distant, emotionally volatile, radical, tense, disorderly, conservative, rule conscious or placid. A more important and practical application of the research into personality and learning, however, is the need for curricular planners to find ways of encouraging self-belief and self-confidence in students – the 'efficacy' of the USEM model.
- Although the focus of this report is on ways to improve the employability skills of history students, it must not be forgotten that the single most important reason for their choosing to study history is their enjoyment of the subject. This is not to be sniffed at. The motivation that comes from enjoyment is a crucial prerequisite for learning to take place. For the most part, students were not choosing history at school or at university because of its skills content or because they saw it as a passport to a job. Rather, they saw it as an opportunity to study something that interested them. It cannot be stressed enough that, if this enjoyment and the attendant motivation to learn were to be stymied by an obsession with employability and skills, then any such changes to the curriculum predicated on such an obsession would be counter-productive. It is the contention here that employability skills can be improved with some relatively minor adjustments to the curriculum and by closer attention to the planning and mapping of progressive skills development. Success in recent years in embedding skills in a largely traditional curriculum shows that incremental change is entirely feasible.
- Following on from this last point, the main message of this report is that employability is largely incidental to a well-thought out curriculum which seeks to create critical, reflective, autonomous learners who have confidence in their own capabilities. Knowledge and skills are largely nugatory without the self-belief to make best use of them. Students educated in this way will be employable but the fact that not all employers will want students with such critical capacity should give the lie to the notion that such a progressive curriculum is an instrumentalist one designed to meet the needs of the economy rather than to transform the lives of individuals.

References

[i] For a more up-to-date breakdown of first destinations, see Appendix A of this report and for a critique of their value as performance indicators, see Lee Harvey, 'Defining and Measuring Employability in Higher Education', in *Quality in Higher Education*, 7, 2 (2001), pp. 97-108.
[ii] They can be downloaded from the CIHE web-site: www.cihe-uk.com
[iii] Alan Bullock, *Have the Humanities Ceased to be Relevant?* (Oxford University Computing Service, 1986).
[iv] CVCP, DfEE, *Skills Development in Higher Education* (November, 1998).
[v] Dawn Lees, *Graduate Employability – Literature Review* (ESECT Report, LTSN, October 2002), p. 2.
[vi] Personal Development Plans become a requirement from 2005-06.
[vii] *THES*, 11 May 2001, p. 8.
[viii] DfEE, *Opportunity and Skills in the Knowledge-Driven Economy* (2001).
[ix] Page 78. As over 90% of schools already devote 25-50 hours of curriculum time to work experience at KS4 and no additional curriculum time has been allocated, this proposal is likely to have little effect. Rob Ward and David Pierce, 'Employability and students' educational experiences before entering higher education' (ESECT Briefing Paper, LTSN, January 2003).
[x] *Guardian*, 13 January, 2004.
[xi] For a succinct summary of this argument, see N. Bennett, E. Dunne and C. Carré, *Skills Development in Higher Education and Employment* (SRHE & Open University Press, Buckingham, 2000), chapter 1.
[xii] Beryl Dixon, *What can I do with…an arts degree?* (Trotman & Co., Richmond, 2002), p. 12.
[xiii] Bennett et al, *Skills Development,* p. 15.
[xiv] For examples of such lists, see Peter Knight and Mantz Yorke, *Assessment, Learning and Employability* (SRHE & Open University Press, Buckingham, 2003), pp. 89 & 151-2. They themselves identify three broad categories – personal qualities, core skills and process skills – sub-divided into 39 'aspects of employability'. Dearing, as we have seen, prioritised just four.
[xv] Brenda Little, *Developing Key Skills through Work Placement* (CIHE, QSC, November 1998).
[xvi] See Alan Booth, 'Developing History Students' Skills in the Transition to University', in *Teaching in Higher Education*, 6, 4 (2001), p. 489. Booth identifies four categories of skills developed in a history degree: basic study; high intellectual; communication; personal. Compare also the list in the leaflet produced by Diane Appleton for distribution to undergraduates by careers officers. AGCAS, *Your Degree in History…What Next?* (2003).
[xvii] M.J. Atkins, 'Oven-ready and Self-basting: taking stock of employability skills', in *Teaching in Higher Education*, 4, 2 (1999), pp. 267-80. Atkins argues that it might be more effective, in practical and resource terms, to invest in post-graduate induction to the world of work.
[xviii] For discussion of transferability issues, see Alison Assiter (ed.), *Transferable Skills in Higher Education* (Kogan Page, 1995); Graham Gibbs, Chris Rust, Alan Jenkins and David Jacques, *Developing Students' Transferable Skills* (Oxford Centre for Staff Development, 1994); Alan Brown, 'The Development of Key Skills across Contexts and over Time', in *Capability*, 3, 2 (1997), pp.16-20; John Raven and John Stephenson (eds), *Competence in the Learning Society* (Peter Lang, New York, 2001), pp. x-xii.
[xix] See Lee Harvey, 'Transitions from higher education to work' (ESECT Briefing Paper, LTSN web-site); Lee Harvey, Sue Moon and Vicki Geall, *Graduates' Work: Organisational Change and Students' Attributes* (Centre for Research into Quality, 1997): 'If there was to be a single recommendation to come from this research, it would be to encourage all undergraduate programmes to offer students an option of a year-long work placement and employers to be less reluctant to provide placement opportunities.' (p. 3).
[xx] *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 13 December 2002. Levels of numeracy and literacy are particular bugbears.
[xxi] P. Brown, A. Hesketh, S. Williams, 'Employability in a Knowledge-driven Economy', paper at Skills *Plus* conference, Manchester Metropolitan University, 13 June 2002. The authors cite the work of Bourdieu and others on 'positional conflict theory'. Credentials and personal qualities are emphasised in the labour market to reinforce the existing social structure as it advantages those social élites who possess the appropriate cultural capital.
[xxii] Louise Morley, 'Producing New Workers: quality, equality and employability in higher education', in *Quality in Higher Education*, 7, 2 (2001), pp. 131-38.

[xxiii] See the detailed research undertaken for HEFCE by the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI): Z. Blasko, *Access to what: analysis of factors determining graduate employability* (November 2002).
[xxiv] Compare, however, Libby Ashton and Bahram Bekhradnia, *Demand for Graduates – a review of the economic evidence* (2003) – available at www.hepi.ac.uk – who argue that the number of graduate level jobs has risen for several decades and will continue to do so; that universities have successfully met this demand; that the problem is not therefore a shortage of highly skilled graduates but a failure of employers to make good use of them. See also, Neil Moreland, *Entrepreneurship and higher education: an employability perspective* (ESECT Learning and Employability report, vol 6, LTSN, 2004). Graduates themselves do not share Ashton and Bekhradnia's confidence in the capacity of the market to provide graduate-level jobs and there has been a steady decline in their expectations to the point where, by 2003, only 37% of them believed they would secure such a job on leaving university. Over 50% of finalists believed not enough graduate jobs were available. *The UK Graduate Careers Survey 2003* (High Fliers Research Ltd, 2003). Nevertheless, as recent surveys have consistently shown, a degree carries a premium, for graduates will earn more than non-graduates over their working lives.
[xxv] *Guardian*, 12 & 13 January, 2004.
[xxvi] Wolf, *Does Education Matter?*, pp. 254-6.
[xxvii] Ronald Barnett, *The Limits of Competence* (Open University Press, Buckingham, 1994).
[xxviii] Assiter (ed.), *Transferable Skills*, p. 18. See also, Colin Symes and John McIntyre (eds), *Working Knowledge. The New Vocationalism in Higher Education* (SRHE & Open University Press, Buckingham, 2000), chapter 3.
[xxix] The definition of reflective learning by Lees, *Graduate Employability*, p. 8 brings out well its importance to employability and to life in general. It 'refers to the capacity to develop critical consideration of one's own world-view and the relationship to the world of others. It is the ability to transcend preconceptions, prejudices and frames of reference and it underlies the capacity to learn from others and from experience.' Barnett would probably not demur at this. He would agree that the objective of higher education is to create critical learners. How best to do this is the key issue. See R. Barnett, *Higher Education: A Critical Business* (SRHE and Open University Press, Buckingham, 1997).
[xxx] John Brennan, Brenda Johnston, Brenda Little, Tarla Shah and Alan Woodley, *The Employment of UK Graduates: Comparisons with Europe and Japan* (Report to HEFCE by the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information, Open University, 2001).
[xxxi] This is not to say that all is rosy. There is still a mountain to climb before the scholarship of teaching is afforded the same attention and recognition as the scholarship of research.
[xxxii] Booth, 'Developing History Students' Skills', p. 488.
[xxxiii] Lees, ' Graduate Employability', p. 5.
[xxxiv] ESECT leaflet 'Enhancing Student Employability'.
[xxxv] Knight and Yorke, *Assessment, Learning and Employability*, p. 5.
[xxxvi] Lee Harvey, 'On Employability', available on the ILTHE web-site.
[xxxvii] For a short summary of what is understood by 'capable people', see John Stephenson and Mantz Yorke, *Capability and Quality in Higher Education* (Kogan Page, 1998), p. 2.
[xxxviii] For a short description of the USEM model, see Knight and Yorke, *Assessment, Learning and Employability*, pp. 8-9.
[xxxix] Ibid., p. 9. On the importance of efficacy beliefs in learning, see A. Bandura, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* (Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1986).
[xl] Programme Improvement Through Alumni Research (www.pitar.co.uk); Brennan et al, *The Employment of UK Graduates*; Geoff Mason, Gareth Williams, Sue Cranmer and David Guile, *How Much Does Higher Education Enhance the Employability of Graduates* (HEFCE, 2002).
[xli] I am grateful to the schoolteachers who kindly organised the distribution, collation and return of the questionnaires and to the lecturers and alumni officers who helped with other parts of the project.
[xlii] See David Nicholls, 'Famous History Graduates', in *History Today*, 52, 8 (August 2002), pp. 49-51. Many of the famous graduates are currently being filmed for a DVD that will be included, from 2005, in the Historical Association's *Choosing History at 14* resource pack. It will be distributed to all secondary schools that teach GCSE history.
[xliii] I am grateful to the PITAR team for their help with the structuring of my questionnaires.
[xliv] The percentages total more than one hundred because many students adduced more than one reason – the cohort of 199 produced 253.

[xlv] The mean for the famous graduates excludes the five IT scores as including these would have created an unfair comparison. For further details, see below p. 27.
[xlvi] The full breakdown was as follows: under 1 month 18.5%; 1-6 months 32.2%; 6-12 months 14.5%; 1-2 years 9.2%; over 2 years 25.6%.
[xlvii] Cf. below, p. 28.
[xlviii] The CHERI survey found that 80% of the history graduates in its sample were in employment three-and-a-half years after graduation – a comparable figure to that for other non-vocational subjects. J. Brennan et al, *The English Degree and Graduate Careers* (published by the English Subject Centre, www.English.ltsn.ac.uk), pp. 17 & 38.
[xlix] The Warwick survey of 10,000 graduates of 1995 from all subject areas found an unemployment rate of 2% three years after graduation. DfEE-CSU-AGCAS-IER, *Moving On – Graduate Careers Three Years After Graduation* (1999). It also found that further study enhances employability so the prospects for the recent postgraduates in temporary employment are encouraging.
[l] It relates to the experience of a lady who had left school at 16 to become a sales assistant, took time out to do her degree and then returned to the same job.
[li] These are identified by calculating the difference between the skill-levels at graduation [Appendix C, Table 1] and those required in current employment [Appendix C, Table 5].
[lii] See above, p. 4.
[liii] For further details and to put names to jobs, see Nicholls, 'Famous Graduates'. There is also evidence that history graduates are more likely to enter the private sector than other graduates in the arts and humanities and the social sciences. See Brennan et al, *The English Degree*, p. 20 & table 9, p. 39. Employment in the private sector may, over time, help to overcome early disadvantages in remuneration for history graduates.
[liv] The undifferentiated second class degree at Oxford has been included in this category.
[lv] *Guardian,* G2, 8 January 2001.
[lvi] The report by Brennan et al for the English Subject Centre uses data for history extrapolated from the larger CHERI survey. It is interesting that, while teamwork was in the top five of the skills at graduation for the whole sample (Brennan et al, *The Employment of UK Graduates*, p. 25), it scored low among history graduates.
[lvii] See above, p. 4.
[lviii] The PITAR survey found the three largest skills gaps in history to be: computer skills, applying rules and regulations, and oral communication. PITAR, *Report*, p. 29.
[lix] Crozier, op. cit., pp. 143-44, 168.
[lx] L. Hudson, *Contrary Imaginations. A Psychological Study of the English Schoolboy* (Methuen, 1966).
[lxi] R. Barry, *The One Thousand. The Men and Women Who Command the Heights of the UK's Economy* (Institute for Employment Research, Warwick, 1998); *Guardian Education*, 16 Feb. 1999. Other tests on university students, at Keele (1969) and Nottingham (1997), also supported, with some qualifications, Hudson's general hypothesis. See J. Hartley & M.A. Greggs, 'Divergent Thinking in Arts and Science Students: *Contrary Imaginations* at Keele revisited', in *Studies in Higher Education*, 22 (1), 1997, pp. 93-7.
[lxii] This seemingly low cut-off point reflects the free choice that respondents were given which meant that the percentages as a whole were low, ranging from 6.1% to 66.7%.
[lxiii] Any explanation for this on the basis of the evidence available can only be speculative. Perhaps radicalism and non-conformity are more likely to be found in the personalities of the successful but, equally, they may be a legacy of the 'rebellious' 1960s when many of the famous graduates were in their youth.
[lxiv] It is necessary, however, to sound a note of caution. It is possible that many of the respondents interpreted these skills in a straightforward epistemological way – that is, in a discipline-related rather than cognitive sense. Hence, for example, the ability to reflect may have been understood as the ability to make considered judgements about historical sources and interpretations rather than as the ongoing capacity to critically review their learning. This may explain why performance in these two skills does not appear to have been improved by the recent changes in the higher education curriculum (see next bullet-point). The problem of interpreting the data here is illustrative of the semantic difficulties associated with the language of skills alluded to at the outset of this report and the evidence assembled here should be seen not as definitive but rather as a pointer to the need for further investigation.
[lxv] Mason et al, *How Much Does Higher Education Enhance the Employability of Graduates*, p.10.
[lxvi] Ibid., p. 11. The absence of, or slow, improvement in developing some key skills is less excusable when it is remembered that the same critical weaknesses have been pinpointed for many years now. For

example, a survey of 5,000 graduates from 21 institutions carried out nearly a decade ago concluded that oral communication, computing and numerical skills were the least developed. Kate Purcell and Jane Pitcher, *Great Expectations. The New Diversity of Graduate Skills and Aspirations* (CSU, October 1996).

[lxvii] Yet, six out of ten of the line managers of these history graduates said they preferred candidates with work experience. Mason et al, *How Much Does Higher Education Enhance the Employability of Graduates*, pp. 5-10, 19. See also the evidence from students in DfEE et al, *Moving On*.

[lxviii] Pauline Elkes, *Directory of 'Employability' Provision in History Departments in HE Today* (2004; available from Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology). There have been many projects and initiatives in recent years but they often fall by the wayside when funding ceases. The task is to find ways of embedding and 'naturalising' them as a routine part of the curriculum.

[lxix] Compared with only about one in two of the famous graduates, the majority of whom graduated some time ago.

[lxx] *Guardian Education*, 12 October 2004.

[lxxi] The survey was carried out by Reed Executive in 2001 and is reported in Lee Harvey, William Locke, Alistair Morey, *Enhancing Employability, Recognising Diversity* (Universities UK & CSU, 2002), p. 35.

[lxxii] Barbara Hibbert, '"It's a lot harder than politics"…students' experience of history at Advanced Level', in *Teaching History*, 109 (Dec. 2002), pp. 39-43 is one of very few attempts to tackle this issue.